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THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.



THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

SIX LECTURES

DELIVERED IN HEREFORD CATHEDRAL DURING
HOLY WEEK, 1871.

BY

ALFRED BARRY, D.D., D.C.L.,

PRINCIPAL OF KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

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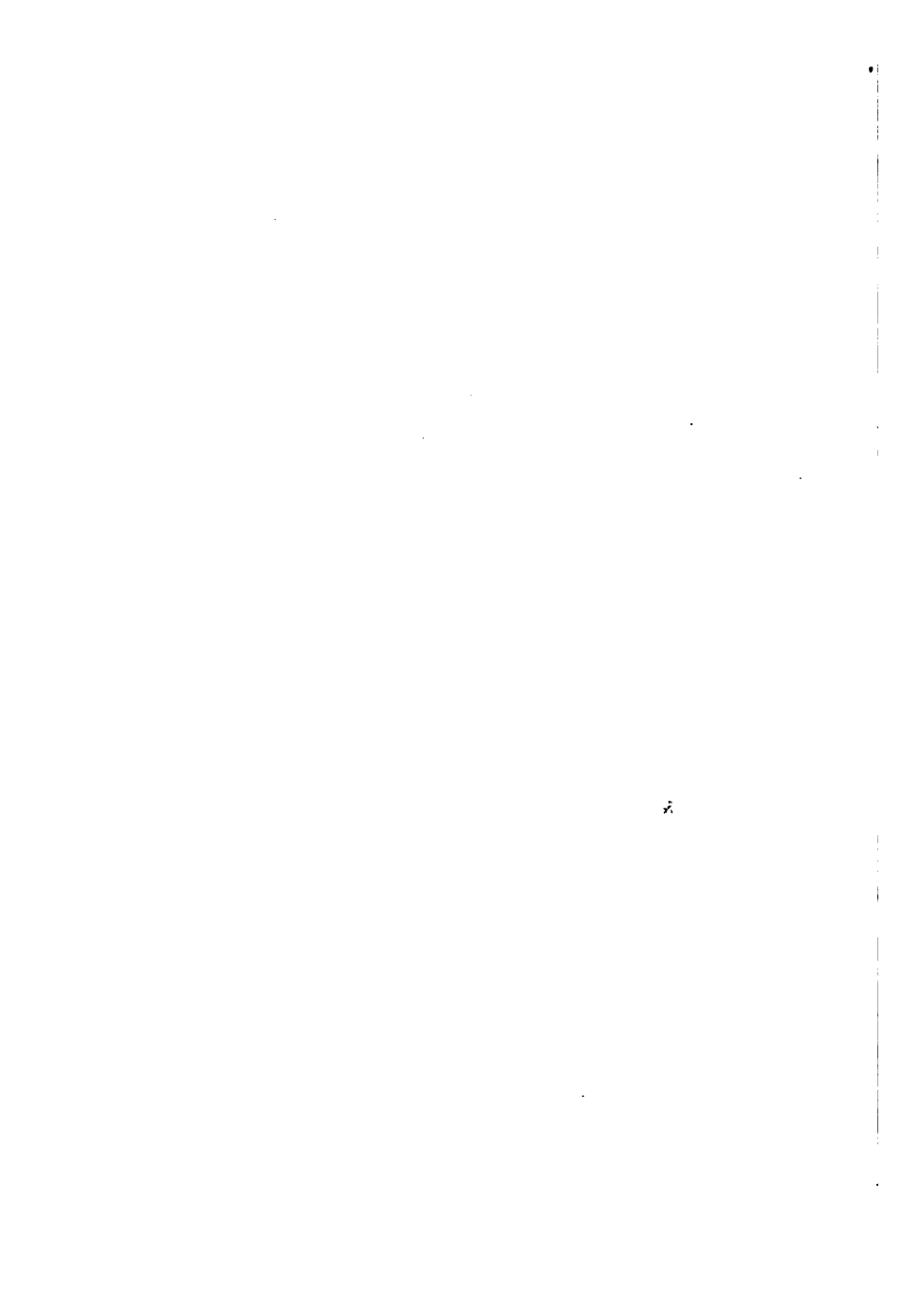
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TO THE
HONOURABLE AND VERY REVEREND
GEORGE HERBERT, M.A.,
DEAN OF HEREFORD,
THESE SERMONS,
PREACHED BY HIS APPOINTMENT,
AND PUBLISHED BY HIS REQUEST,
ARE DEDICATED,
IN TOKEN OF OLD FRIENDSHIP
AND SINCERE RESPECT FOR HIS CATHEDRAL WORK.



PREFACE.

THESE Sermons need but a few words of Preface. They are published because some who heard them felt that the subjects brought under consideration needed to be thought over more deliberately than could be the case at the time of hearing. They aim at setting forth the deep practical importance of the doctrinal Truths of the Atonement. Should they be read by any student of Theology, he will see at once where I am indebted to well-known writers on this subject in the past and the present times, although I have not thought it necessary to encumber my pages with needless references to authorities.

The one truth which, beyond all others, I desire that they may suggest, is the inseparable unity which must exist between Christian doctrine, even in its more mysterious forms, and Christian morality or devotion. They are a slight contribution to the plea for that connection of Religion and Theology, which in our own time is so frequently and, as it seems to me, so unreasonably

denied. If there is some abstract difficulty in treating theological subjects in Sermons, it is perhaps counter-balanced by the sense which the very atmosphere of worship and the sight of the faces of Christian men must impress on the preacher, of the living reality and spiritual efficacy of the great Truths proclaimed.

A. B.

KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON,
May 1, 1871.

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I.

THE CRY FOR SALVATION.

(Palm Sunday.)



I.

THE CRY FOR SALVATION.

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ROMANS VIII. 22, 23.

“The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

“THE whole creation”—God’s creation, made by Him very good, ruled by a Will, which, if it be Divine at all, must be perfect in wisdom and in love—“the whole creation groans and travails in one common pain.” These are words of strange and perplexing sadness, against which our baser and our nobler instincts alike protest. Those who would make all things pleasant, and value life just in proportion to the degree in which it removes all obstacles to man’s enjoyment, whether in its physical or its mental or its æsthetic forms, naturally recoil from a statement which cannot be worked into the smooth, bright texture of their philosophy. Those who believe ardently and profoundly in the Love of God, and who know that their own greatest happiness is in spreading the light of happiness to others, shrink with an intense feeling of anguish from any view which seems to cloud

the sunshine of God's mercy from His creatures, and leave Him awful and impassive within the veil, while the groaning and weeping of His creatures go up as into mere dreary and unsympathising space. And I think we do well to shrink and tremble at such words as those of St. Paul in the text ; they seem to be wrung from him unwillingly ; we can hardly fancy that he spoke them without a sound of tears in his voice. If they contained all the truth, or even the main truth, of human life, I know not how we could do anything but "curse God and die."

But are they true? I will not speak of that wider sense of the word "creation," accepted by the fullest knowledge and the deepest thought, which extends the declaration far beyond the race of man. Take only the narrower sense ; let the words speak only of mankind. If we lift our eyes from the pages of the Word of God, and examine that broader though vaguer writing which fills the book of the world's history, we dare not say that they are false. If we look to the wretchedness which in great masses of our people seems to mock the healing powers of human love and Divine grace—if we catch a glimpse of the many tragedies of the individual soul, which are being played in the commonest life—if we cast our glance over the wider region of Europe, the chosen home of civilization and of Christianity, especially as these last nine months have shown it to us, and as, we fear, years to come must show it still, heaving in wild confusion, stained by bloodshed and furious with a self-destroying madness—if, I say, we think seriously of

these things and put all illusions away, we cannot but be convinced that St. Paul's picture is from the life, and that there is a sense true—painfully and perplexingly true—in which the whole creation does “groan and travail in pain.”

It is not that the Gospel has either created the fact or revealed it as a truth utterly new. In the more thoughtful forms of modern infidelity, the sense of misery and impotence has overpowered the complacent optimism of worldly carelessness or of shallower philosophies. All that Christianity really does is, perhaps, by cultivation of man's higher aspirations, to make his sensitiveness to present misery greater, but certainly to bring out the darkness of evil and sorrow by contrast with the brightness of hope.

For, after all, it is here that the unspeakable difference lies. St. Paul, when in his first verse he has, as it were, summarized the experience of mankind as apart from communion with God, goes on, indeed, in the second to declare that “we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves”—with, as I gather, a keener and intenser anguish, proportionate to our greater measure of spiritual light. Just so elsewhere he had said, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,” simply because the knowledge of the Gospel must awaken capacities and kindle desires, which this life cannot satisfy. But he is able to add, “we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption” of our sonship, “the redemption” even of this body of pain. And, indeed, this whole passage, sad as it is, lies only like a dark

island on a great expanse of light, which spreads through the rest of this glorious chapter, and seems by reflection almost to bring down to earth the very glory of heaven. The Gospel, as I have said, is not needed to declare the present burden of misery, but it *is* needed to give that sure and certain hope through which the burden can be even gladly borne. If its light could be put out, then there is no other which could scatter the darkness. If Christ be far away, there is no voice of comfort which can still the groaning of creation—no healing touch which shall alleviate its pain.

Surely, my brethren, this train of thought is one which befits well this Holy Week of the Cross, mingling as it does the thoughts of sorrow and of joy, in deep sense of mystery and yet deeper certainty of faith. The Cross, so far as I know, alone answers the question, "How can the existence of misery be compatible with God's Infinite Power and Love?" I do not undervalue the other two voices, which sound at least to protest against, if they cannot silence, the practical inference of despair, that "there is no God." There is a voice in the great world without. Never can we fail to hear what all ages have heard—the witness of beauty and wisdom and love in the works of Nature. Recent speculations at most seem to subtilize that witness; nay (to my mind) they compensate in some degree for removing God farther away from us, by enlarging infinitely the grandeur and majesty of His creative energy. It must still bring home, to our intellects and even more vividly to our imaginations, the belief that after all God is very good, that misery and

death are not the rule, but the exception—an exception painful and mysterious, but an exception still. But then this belief is too wide and too vague. Its voice is like the voice of many waters; we know that it has a great tale to tell, but what that tale is we hear at most only in snatches. How little can it speak, to our own individual sense of burden or of darkness! What if we, and those we love better than ourselves, are the sad exceptions, pitilessly used up in the great process? What power is there in the sense of some general scheme of beauty, or law of beneficence, working itself out through the ages, to

“minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain?”

Sadly, almost indignantly, we answer, “that the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and that no stranger intermeddleth with its joy.” We know that there are many times in life when man can recognise no existences except God and his own soul.

But suppose we turn our ear from this great voice, echoing dimly and grandly through the world without, and hearken to the voice which speaks within, telling us again that Righteousness and Purity and Love are the law stamped on our nature by God; that, whatever may seem to be, whatever may be for a time, these must eventually work out happiness, because they are accordant to the will of God; that all the sorrow which we see can only be the means of some great discipline of humanity, to train it for an unknown bliss in an unknown heaven. Here indeed we lose all that vagueness and

want of personal directness. The voice speaks to our own souls in the silence of their great struggles or lonely thoughtfulness; and its story, so far as it goes, is terse and clear and searching. But then, in gaining those qualities, it has lost all that gave power to the other voice. It seems to rise simply out of some inner consciousness of our own, with which the consciousness of others seems to differ, or at best to agree only in some bare first principles of truth. What if this single consciousness of ours be wrong? And then, again, with every change of our knowledge and age it seems in some degree to vary; every sense of ignorance makes it falter; every spell of sin makes it babble unintelligibly, or tell a tale of falsehood. We want something greater, clearer, more certain than this—something which will unite with the clear directness of the voice within, the majesty and beauty of the voice without. Where shall we find it?

Again I say, brethren, only in the Truth of Christ,—in the Truth especially of Christ crucified,—on which, at this Holy Season, we dwell in thought and prayer. The Cross of Christ, as He Himself interprets it, tells a tale, which is one, simple, indivisible—a Revelation of God's Love to the whole race of man, in direct reference to those very facts of sin, sorrow, and death, from which all mere Natural theologies turn away. Yet it is—do you not know that it is?—most keenly and intensely personal. These simple, well-known words—

“Thou art as much His care, as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth”—

they speak the truth which has comforted every penitent

sinner in his hour of conversion, which has nerved every struggling servant of God in the crisis of his trial, which has been as a ray of light, piercing through the shadow of death, and showing to the dying the Everlasting Hand that bears him up. It is a truth which recognises all the sadness of life, "the groaning and travailing of all creation," and which, accordingly, repels the careless and the unbelieving, the mere student of Nature, or the believer in the power of social machinery and the spread of knowledge to heal all the evils of humanity. But, while it does thus recognise life's sadness, and therefore is true to human nature and the world as they are, yet it does so in order to take the darkness of that sorrow away; to show men how they can bear it, and why they must bear it; and to tell them of a heaven which is no dream-land of imagination, nor the conclusion of long, weary reasoning, but one where we know that He has gone to prepare our place. There the "Adoption" of our sonship awaits us now in the sight of the Father, and the "redemption of our body" of humiliation is made certain by the presence in Christ of the glorified human nature to which we shall be transformed.

It is because, as I humbly trust, I can hear that voice of Christ crucified; because, in these solemn days to come, I shall strive to bring before you some of the various tones which make it not a bare unison, but a rich and glorious harmony, that to-night I dare ask you to probe this deep sadness of humanity, to inquire what it is, which wrings forth the groans, heartbreaking to utter, almost heartbreaking to hear.

The answer, in its simplest brevity, is not hard to give. Ask your own experience, brethren, in the little circle of your individual life and thought ; ask the experience of all humanity, as it is written broadly on the history and literature of the world, and written more solemnly and more clearly on the utterances of all great leaders of thought. Ask the Word of God, in those faint accents which come to us through the centuries from the earliest ages of humanity, or in the clearest and most decisive words of Christ, spoken by His own lips, or spoken through the souls who lived in Him. Everywhere, in many tones, comes back the one answer. It is the presence of Evil. Call it folly and crime, as wise men call it ; call it by that name of "sin," in which it stands, hideously naked, before the Eye of God ; call it by what name you will, even in the language of the world, that court-language of the Devil, which seeks to gild over its blackness, and turn its foulness into a perverted beauty. Still, it is this Evil under which, after all, creation groans. Do not tell me of bodily suffering and hardship, sickness and death. Of these things, even as they come visibly before us, three-fourths, at least, are due to the presence of sin : and, after all, they can be borne ; we cry shame on those who shriek under them. Do not lay all the blame on the ignorance that hems us in,—that ignorance of the world and of ourselves and of God, which the circle of our knowledge touches at more points every day, just in proportion to its expansion. I grant that this is harder, perhaps, to bear than the other. "Give us light, though light be our destruction," is the noble prayer

which comes home to every heart and soul. But this again we can bear for a time ; there is light enough to show us the way, and, if the darkness of mystery does seem to eclipse the Sun of Righteousness, yet here, just as in the realm of Nature, it is on the skirts of mystery that knowledge makes its brightest discoveries of beauty and of truth. But sin—selfishness and foulness, falsehood and cruelty, profaneness and blasphemy—even if they did not bring, as they do bring, unutterable consequences of anguish to body and soul in their train, still these things, even in themselves, we cannot bear without groaning. It is a treason against man and God, if they are borne patiently. Those pleas that evil is an inherent law of life—a lower form of good—a rival power of darkness, dividing the world with the power of light—what are they but mere notions, by which man tries either to cloak the evil from his eyes, or to exaggerate it into a Power to which he may rightly bow? We know in our hearts that each is like a new stab of a moral suicide. They may do for fair-weather carelessness ; but they will not stand the strain of the storm of persecution or the heaving of the waves of sorrow. It is under sin that the whole world groans, even when it no more knows why it suffers than one who tosses uneasily in a fevered sleep. And in proportion as we have “the first-fruits of the Spirit,” the sense of sin is clearer, more oppressive, more intolerable. We ourselves groan within ourselves, under a burden, the whole weight of which only He, our dear Lord, bore on Calvary, but which, in their measure and degree, all true lovers of God and of Christ must be content to know.

But let us draw this simple answer out more fully. What is it in the sense of sin which is so intolerable to man? Perhaps the most essential and the most oppressive of its terrors arises out of that doubt, which has so often crossed men's minds, whether it is an element of life, defying even the power and the will of God, spoiling what He had made very good, pressing in, unforeseen and irresistible, to break the perfect circle of His creation. There was an old faith (at which I have glanced already) which made the world a battle-field of two rival Deities ; too often, unacknowledged, but yet implied, the horror of this Manichean Dualism lies at the root of many forms of thought. I speak not here of those who wish this horror to be true, and who rejoice in fancying its truth to be a justification of their sin, but of those who cry out with the Psalmist, "Nevertheless my feet were almost gone, my treadings had well-nigh slipped. And why? I was grieved at the wicked, I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity." Nay, there have been forms even of the preaching of the Cross, which have spoken of Satan almost as a power co-ordinate with God, which have spoken of sin as an unforeseen rebellion, and the Atonement—be it said without irreverence—as a Divine afterthought, to remedy a defect in God's creative foresight and natural law. But, my brethren, this cannot be ; it must not be held even for an hour. Else how can we really believe in One Eternal and Almighty God? The Atonement of the Cross is (says St. Peter) "foreknown before the foundation of the world." Sin is a rebellion against the will of God declared to us (the

"Second Law Eternal" of our great English Divine); but it cannot strive successfully and independently against that inherent Will which, as a "First Law Eternal," is enshrined in the bosom of God. The Cross of Christ was set up on earth only eighteen hundred years ago; by a few eyes was it seen then, by only some portion of humanity is it known now. But in God's eternal counsels it is more than primeval. There never was a time when sin was not in those counsels atoned for and overruled; there never was, as there never shall be, a time when that horrible idea of its independence and its eternity could be, even for one brief instant, maintained. This is the first point which we must ponder¹ in the message told by the Cross to the groaning and travailing world.

But even if this great oppression, which is the very death of faith and love, be removed, then still there presses upon us the feeling of an actual bondage which sin binds upon the soul. We know that in theory, and in some sense in truth, each man is free: able to stand up against and defy the power of evil; able, by the knowledge and grace of God, to grow up unto the perfection of good. But yet still there is a sense of what St. Paul calls a "law," that is, a bondage "of sin." Even from the beginning we see it growing over the child's innocent nature; we know that there is a power, through temptation of appetite and passion, to lead the will captive; we know too well that there are real fetters in the power of evil habit, which the sinner, especially the drunkard or the sensualist,

¹ See Sermon II.

often struggles hopelessly to break ; we see that there is such power of evil, in the circumstances of many a life (often the fruits, be it observed, of the sin of others), that there seems for it no chance of good. It is a real and a terrible power, and with it, as it were in the background, there is a fresh bondage in the curse which it brings, and under which, after a certain time of trial and grace, the soul lies reprobate and spiritually dead, most wretched in this, that it has ceased to groan and struggle.

My brethren, in different degrees we must all know this bondage, as it weighs on our nation and on our own selves. What shall deliver us from it? Can God justly break the chains which man has forged for himself? Can one man, himself a bondman, redeem the souls of others and set them free? It is a question which all men, who think and feel, must ask. But, again, to it I know no possible answer, except the answer of the Cross. There, and there only, is set forth a Redeemer, at once God and man, who has broken the yoke of this bondage for the race, who will guide each individual soul by His grace to grow up into perfect freedom. It is as our actual Redeemer that we must learn to know and adore Him.¹ In Him it is no theory, but a blessed fact, realized in thousands of simple lives every day, that the bondage is broken for us, if only we will. It is, as it once was at midnight in a certain prison-house at Philippi; the groaning of the captives is hushed by the glad praises of the ransomed souls; and we feel that a time is coming

¹ See Sermon III.

when "all the doors shall be opened and every one's bands loosed" for ever.

Ay, but even if the bondage of sin be broken, what shall we say of the guilt of sin? How shall that be forgiven, without sinning against the Eternal Truth and the unswerving Righteousness of God, on which the universe of things and of persons rests? Surely (we say), if God is a Father, He will forgive; we are to forgive "seventy times seven," and we do forgive again and again from the bottom of our hearts. But yet how shall this be? It is easy for equals to forgive equals. But what of a lawgiver and a judge? or even a father? Do we not know day by day, that just in proportion to our greatness and authority, our power to forgive is limited; punishment at least there must be; the innocent and guilty cannot be all one to us? Yes! and all the imperfections of human retribution we lay up, as it were, for the all-perfect justice of God. He, if we may dare to say so, is the One Being to whom, because He is Sovereign, forgiveness without punishment or atonement is most impossible. Granted that His love is always shining on us; yet what shall clear away the cloud of guilt which sin has raised, and make His love, as we say of the sun, "come out" to us again? Surely the difficulty is a real one: it cannot be got over by a vague faith in an undistinguishing benevolence. The great rite of sacrifice, running through every fibre of the thoughts of humanity, often degraded by superstition and folly, often protested against by many noble instincts, yet fated never to die—this rite (I say) is the witness for the need of an

Atonement, in which God and man shall meet to take away this guilt of sin. Yes! a witness of the need, but yet no supply of the reality. For that once more we look to what we rightly call the great "Sacrifice" of the Cross. Christ is our Propitiation.¹ Speculation may doubt whether it is so; even faith is perplexed how it can be. But the heart which groans under the burden of sin's guilt, and feels the estrangement from God, hails His sacrifice with an adoring thankfulness; and, though some sound of awe and solemnity remains, yet in that adoration the groaning passes away.

Yet is this all? No, brethren, I think not yet. Let the bondage be broken; let the guilt be taken away; still there is a groaning of loneliness—a cry of the individual soul for unity with its fellows, and for the greater unity with God. Alone we are weak and desolate still. What life on this earth is worth living—what heaven is even conceivable—without this sense of unity made living by love? Yet, again, how shall it be? Who can break down the barriers, which by isolation guard man's freedom, and by which at this moment every soul in this Cathedral is in some sense alone—alone in secrets of the conscience which no eye can see, in the freedom which no power can bend, and which no truth or love can be sure to reach? Still more, who can bring the finite into communion with the Infinite? Who can bridge over the gulf of mystery between the Eternal Creator and the beings of a day? There have been idolatries which claimed to do it, but at

¹ See Sermon IV.

the expense of God's majesty ; there have been rigid systems of monotheism which refused to do it, but at the expense of man's spirituality and life. There is but one faith which solves the problem—the faith in a Divine Mediator, who was “lifted up to draw all men unto Him,” that in Him they might be one with God. In that Divine Mediation the other truths of Redemption and of Propitiation are made possible ; and in it there is the yet higher truth of unity with God, on which alone the spiritual nature of man can rest.¹ Well may we groan in degradation, well may we travail in vain longing, if it be withheld. But what joy flows from that perfect unity let the song of heaven testify, which from a thousand times a thousand tongues goes up for ever, not only to the God who sits upon the throne, but to the Lamb who has made them one with Him for ever.

So it is, brethren, that through the real needs of men we learn to realize the greatness and blessedness of the Cross. These words, “Redemption,” “Propitiation,” “Mediation,” men tell us that they are the mere abstract terms of a theology with which practical life and simple Christianity have nothing to do. But I appeal to your own consciousness. Have I spoken to-night of things of which your daily life knows nothing? Sin in its rebellion against God's majesty, sin in its bondage of the soul, sin in its burden of guilt, sin in the spiritual darkness of isolation—are not these things known to you but too well? Can you live under them, and feel no burden? It is well surely that Lent and Holy Week

¹ See Sermon V.

should hush something of the laughter and the din, which drown the groaning of the spirit. It is well that you should hear and utter the sounds of a thoughtful sorrow. But it is well, only if it brings you to the Cross, to catch some glimpse of the unutterable mysteries which in the great Atonement are bound up.

Night after night this church of God will open its doors to you ; night by night (if it please God) till the Good Friday itself, shall we seek here to draw out the lessons of the Cross. Surely you will come, to think and to pray. The voice of the preacher may fail to come home to you ; he may fail to bring out even the fragment of truth that he knows ; he may need to pray forgiveness for the faults even in that message of forgiveness, which he seeks to utter. But the higher power of worship here, in the very sight of Calvary, and in the very presence of Him who there once hallowed the Cross of agony and shame, it must, it will draw you to Him. There will be some sounds of mourning in this worship ; there is a plaintive music contrasted with the jubilation of Easter, yet surely beautiful with at least an equal beauty. But the groaning in it is not the groaning of the world, hopeless in the darkness ; it is but the yearning expectation of the dawn. It is the cry, "Watchman, will the night soon pass?" And that cry comes only from those who know that the night will be over, nay, that it is far spent already ; who are listening for that trumpet sound, which (as in a well-known strain of noble music) shall awaken the voice of thanksgiving, and blend all undercurrents of mourning into the harmony of one great "Hymn of Praise."

II

THE ATONEMENT BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

(Monday before Easter.)

II.

THE ATONEMENT BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

(Monday before Easter.)

I PETER I. 19, 20.

"Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot : who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

IN these celebrated words, almost unique in Holy Scripture, we have, brethren, as it seems to me, a truth full of mystery indeed, but yet a truth which our faith can firmly grasp, and which, above all things, the burden of this life needs. I tried to show you last night how the groaning of all creation, the real perplexity and sorrow of this world, brings us to One, who in life called to Him emphatically "the weary and heavy laden," and who, on the Cross, spent His last earthly thoughts on those who felt life's burden, in prayer for the sinners who nailed Him to the tree, in comfort of the sorrow of His childless Mother, in forgiveness to the penitence of the thief at His side. And I sought also to remind you, appealing to your own experience and your own consciousness, that the real source

of that sorrow is sin, and that the most intolerable idea, or even fancy, connected with sin is the conception of it, as a thing unforeseen and unprovided for in the scheme of God's creation, a rival power in His universe, which conquered all God's creative blessing and destroyed His primeval law, and which needed a kind of after-thought of God to conquer it by submission to its penalty. You know how often the theory of the world seems practically thus to acknowledge the independent power of evil ; you know how it allows for and even reckons on sin, as one great factor in the results which it foresees. You know how it deems impurity and self-indulgence in the young, selfishness and deceit in the old, to be laws of Nature, against which it is well perhaps to protest as a matter of form, but which it is only a pious fancy to denounce and seek to exterminate. Perhaps the commonest view of evil in our popular literature at this day is that which half good-humouredly, half-cynically, apologizes for it, and smiles, sadly or contemptuously, on ideal aspirations after good. You know how too often, even in a Christian's view of his own life, there is not sufficient horror of sin, as a thing which was against man's original nature, and which it is a treason against the regeneration of God's Holy Spirit to excuse or acquiesce in. There are many sayings, even of good men and great men, which seem not only to acknowledge, but even to regard not uncomplacently, daily sin and daily forgiveness, daily forgiveness and daily sin, as the true state of a Christian soul. They hardly understand the indignant "God forbid !" of St. Paul when he is asked, " Shall we con-

tinue in sin, that grace may abound?"—hardly go with an Apostle in the constant pressing forward to the things that are before,—hardly even sympathise with the more thoughtful spirits of our own day, in their hope

"That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

But, brethren, these views of the world and of life, how can they agree with our belief in God's sovereign power, or with our conception of His perfect righteousness? Have you yourselves never felt a sickness of heart at the sight of cruelty or foulness, or shuddered at the scorching words of blasphemy? Have you never felt a "hunger and thirst after righteousness" for others, and conceived that it were little to lay down life, if but one sin could be wiped off from the escutcheon of your country? And if so, how can you, how dare you, fancy that in God's sight the power and prevalence of sin could be tolerated for an hour, without some Divine means of atonement, without some Almighty striving of grace against it? Do not think that I would have any child of man forget the weakness and the sin, which cling to him, and which will not quite fall off till that renewal in heaven, through which our viler nature is lost in the image of Christ. No! not for an instant. Else should we deny God's Word and our own conscience, and make a mockery of those confessions which every day open our very service of praise. But what I do urge is, that to acquiesce in sin, either in others or in ourselves, as if it were our true nature, is practically to deny God

Himself, and worship Satan as a rival at His side ; nay, to turn God's mercy through Christ—the very lesson of the Cross—to an encouragement of such acquiescence is, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, terrible, yet not too terrible, to “crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

Now against this awful perversion of the mercy of the Gospel, I know no such safeguard as a firm and thoughtful belief in the great truth of the text. ‘Do not think it strange, do not believe that I would lead you into an unpractical region of thought, if I urge it upon you to-night. Is it not the right time? I grant that it turns our eyes away for a while from that actual Cross on Mount Calvary ; but is this an evil? When every lesson of Holy Scripture, every prayer and every hymn, has fixed the picture of that Cross upon our minds, and even engraved it on our hearts, it is surely needless, I know not whether it is quite reverent, for the preacher to expatiate on its details. I cannot endure that word-painting, which, like some wayside crucifix in the Tyrol, seems to show a belief that the lesson of the Cross is best taught, where the physical features of the suffering are most life-like and bloody, or which (even more irreverently) seeks fancifully to speculate on the various stages of the Passion in the soul of the Divine Sufferer. Before the Cross and in the Agony the angels ministered in silence, and sought (St. Peter tells us) “to look into” the secrets of that great dispensation. It will surely become us better to ask what is the true meaning of that awful suffering. And I repeat that, when we ask that question, we must

in thought turn from the sacrifice accomplished upon earth to the sacrifice as "foreordained" in the Divine counsels "before the foundation of the world." So it was (you remember) in the course of Apostolic preaching. From the Resurrection of Christ, the first great subject dwelt upon after Pentecost, the course of Gospel teaching went back to the Atonement, because it alone gave meaning to the Resurrection ; and once again, through the lips of St. John, back even from the Atonement to the Incarnation, which, by its revelation of the Godhead in the Lord Jesus, made the conception of the Atonement possible. But even here it could not stay, till back from the Incarnation in time St. John led our thoughts through all ages to "the beginning," in "which the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So also it is in respect of the preaching of the Atonement itself. The line of light from the Cross must surely spread alike infinitely in either direction. If in adoring faith and love we carry on the Atonement from the great fact in the past to its efficacy for our souls in the present, to its saving power for man till time shall be no more, so we must carry it backward also. We can never be content till its shadow stretches over all the ages of mankind in the remotest past, till (as again the text comes back to us) we think of Him as "the Lamb slain from the beginning," and of His sacrifice as "foreordained before the foundation of the world."

In fact, I know not how, except by this conception of a primeval atonement, to face the great mystery of the origin of evil. I do not say "to understand it," for

God forbid that we should speculate on that which none can know, unless he can know all the counsels of God ! Even St. Paul, when, in the ninth chapter of the Romans, he approaches the confines of that mystery, only ventures on a "What if" of reverent speculation ; and wherever divine or philosopher or poet has dared to go beyond, the result—a result of righteous retribution—has been folly or heresy. But I say, "to face" the mystery ; for the one class of difficulty which no man can bear is that which is moral or religious—that which seems to sin against righteousness, or to affront the majesty of God. We do not need to know God's eternal counsels, but we do need to know God Himself : and the very shadow of imperfection in His righteousness, the very phantom of any rival power in His Universe, comes like a cloud across our knowledge of Him. It is only when we know of an Atonement, universal in time and in space, that this terrible darkness passes away from the soul.

Think only what we can see on this great subject. We are told that God made man "in His own image," and by that Divine impress raised him far above all created things. In that truth lies the real truth of humanity ; in the grasp of which we are very careless of what speculation may tell us of the physical descent of man. In the forcible words of a well-known historian,¹ uttered not long ago, in a righteous indignation against materialism : "It may be true—I for one care not if it be—that the descent of our mortal bodies may be traced through an ascending series to some glutinous jelly on

¹ See Froude's Address on "Calvinism" at St. Andrews, 1871.

the rocks of a primeval ocean. It is nothing to me how the Maker of me has been pleased to construct the organized substance which I call my body. It is *mine*, but it is not *me*. . . . As Wordsworth says :

“ ‘ Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.
The soul that rises in us, our life's star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
Not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From heaven, which is our home.’ ”

But of that Divine Image in us, what is the chief essence but the mysterious freedom of will, which God has given us—to defy all material force which can kill the body, but knows not how to touch the soul—to hold itself free to receive and to obey only if it will, even those spiritual influences of truth and love which pass the barriers into the inner shrine? It is through this freedom alone that goodness is possible, and that goodness is the working out of the Image of God. What goodness is there in a machine? Is it goodness when a stone falls to the earth's centre, and a gas rises to heaven? Is it goodness when a flower grows up to the sun, or when an organized creature develops into beauty? No! goodness lies in freedom; it is not merely accordance, but free accordance, with the will of God. Even reward and punishment, even the compulsion of law (as St. Paul profoundly teaches), are in themselves necessary evils; their breath dims the pure mirror of goodness and

takes away for a time the reflection of God. It is the creation of free spirits which He has been pleased to make His final work. His chiefest glory is not to be shown in the purity of the Alpine snow, in the loveliness of the tropical forest or the moonlit sea, in the vastness of the starry heavens, at the sight of which we cry, "Lord, what is man?" But it is to be shown in the purity, in the love, in the spiritual greatness of our human will. In these, little as they seem, God has been pleased to show His glory, just as the whole sky is mirrored in the single dewdrop. In them lies the true image of God ; on that image the foreordaining, nay even the possibility, of the Incarnation must ever rest.

But on this possibility of goodness, the possibility of sin waits, like a shadow on the light. We know that man, even as man, can be tempted, by the mysterious story of the temptation in Eden ; and by the plain story of facts which paints to us the Temptation in the wilderness. We know that even the Lord Almighty cannot take away this possibility, unless it pleases Him to destroy what we call man, and make in his place a machine of flesh and blood, a brute creature of high and subtle organization. Can we believe that He foresaw it not? Can we believe that in His mercy He provided not for this possibility, clinging to the creature that He had made? If He overrules the impotent malice of evil now, can we fancy that the primeval malice of Satan was anything except an unconscious instrument in working out a Divine mercy, of which he little knew?

God forbid, brethren, that we should think lightly of

sin, or fail to understand how it is against the will, though not—such is the mystery of a created freedom—against the permission of God ! Vain is it to speculate in detail what might have been, had the childlike innocence of Paradise grown up into the thoughtful manhood of a Christ-like purity, and if without death the body of humiliation had been changed into the glorious likeness of the Son of God. But, from what we know of the exquisite peace and happiness of a spiritual life, even now, we gain a conception of it clear enough to stir the very depths of the heart within, till

“Tears from the depths of some divine despair
Rise in the heart and gather in the eyes,
In thinking of those days that are no more.”

We are unable to realize any manifestation of the Incarnate God save the one which we have seen ; but the deepest thinkers have ever felt that the promise of the Incarnation belongs not to man as sinful, but to man as man, and that without it the image of God in man would have been but an imperfect capacity and not an actual truth. God forbid that we should speak as though sin were not still exceeding sinful, as though (if I may dare so to speak) it wrung from God, in the advent of Christ, a higher blessing than unfallen humanity could have known !

But still how it raises our admiration of God's perfect wisdom, how it deepens our faith in His perfect love, to know that even from the first sin and death were not left to triumph ; that the Lamb of God which taketh away sin was “slain from the beginning ;” that the great mystery of Atonement was “foreknown and foreordained

before the foundation of the world!" It is as when we see in some organized body, not only the mechanism of the health which is natural, but the power which enables the frame to cast off the unnatural poison of disease. Disease is disease still, unnatural and horrible; but we know that the Creator did not mean it to conquer or to destroy; and we thank Him, as it were, afresh. So is it in the soul; we shudder at sin; we know that it is a poison working in pain and weakness: but we feel that God is almighty and all-loving, when we know that the Atonement, even from the beginning, was sin's remedy; that there never was, never could be, a time in which Satan might claim man's spirit as wholly his slave, or in which man lay utterly helpless under an unavoidable gravitation to evil. So, once more, we tremble at death; we feel in it the pang which rends creation; we see in it the symbol of a possible death of the spirit, from which our soul recoils. But in the primeval Atonement lies the certainty of a universal resurrection from the grave, lies the possibility for all of a resurrection to eternal life. True that God's wisdom deemed it needful, and God's providence ordained, that there should be a long preparation for its manifestation on earth. Christ is the centre of history; when the world was ready, He came to redeem it visibly; when His redemptive work is over, then this world itself shall cease. But all the long line of prophecies, from the faint dawn of the promise in Eden to the almost visible revelations in Isaiah's message, while they were "foretellings" of things to come on earth, were but "forth-tellings" of

what was already present in the Divine mind, and present in efficacy to the destiny of mankind. All that we call the various preparations for the Advent in the world were in some sense effects of the ordaining of that Advent. All the veiled teachings of the Spirit of God before He came, were signs of that already restored unity, which sin had vainly striven to break.

Brethren, I feel the weakness of human words to shadow out these great realities. But yet even this faint outline—does it not seem to you to enlarge the whole conception of the Atonement, and of the love of God which is its source, till the mind is borne, as on a grand strain of music, half understood, but wholly and deeply felt, to the very foot of the great throne of God Himself? You may say that all this is to lift the soul too high above the ordinary sins and struggles of life. I reply that this very lifting up gives the needful repose and strength for the struggle. You may have known, perhaps, what it is, in struggling on through a stormy night, to see the clouds open, and to drink in the calmness and beauty of the blue sky or the everlasting stars beyond the rack. So it is that the soul comes back from pondering these deeper things, like Moses from the presence of the Lord, with some reflection of His glory upon it. From the very intensity of our human sympathy for the Human Sufferer of the Cross, it is well sometimes to be thrown back on His eternity, to know Him as foreordained our Redeemer in heaven. It is not wholly without a symbolic meaning that the Cross was seen, not on earth but in heaven, when the voice came to declare, "In this sign shalt thou con-

quer." I have sometimes thought that this conception of vastness is especially our need and our heritage in these days. Not deeper are we in thought, not more vigorous than our fathers; perhaps often less clear and single in our vision; but certainly we have gained the idea of breadth and largeness, in our knowledge of nature, in our thoughts of the history of man, in our conception of the unity and many harmonies of truth. Shall we not seek the same quality in our thoughts of God, and see that the love of Christ in the Atonement, though it passes knowledge, needs to be felt "in all its length and breadth and depth and height?"

But it were well perhaps, before we part this night, to suggest one or two more definite forms of thought, in mere outline, to be pondered, as surely they should be pondered, at home in thoughtfulness and prayer.

The great lesson of all lessons to my mind is that at which I have glanced already, and which is very near to our own consciences. I mean the deep practical belief that sin cannot, need not, must not, conquer any child of man; that we ought never to speak or think of it, either with toleration or with slavish dread; that we ought to feel that in God's perfect wisdom and mercy, the bane and the antidote have come to us out of the same cloud of primeval mystery. I am sure that on the strength of this conviction depends much, very much, of the intensity of our faith, the bravery of our struggle, the comforting and certain hope of victory. Who will say that these things are of little worth?

But hardly less in importance is the conviction, which

thus only we can gain, of the universal power of the great Atonement. I see two great classes of teachings in Holy Scripture. There is one which does but enforce the voice of Natural Revelation, telling us that God loves not some only, but all men that He has made ; that He wills their salvation ; that He will judge them in perfect truth and mercy "by what they have, not by what they have not." Then there is the other class of truths, above all natural insight, telling us that there is one Name and one Name only "given among men by which we must be saved ;" that every soul which is saved shall be saved by the atonement of the Cross. Take away the one truth, where is our faith in God ? Take away the other, where is our faith in Christ ? But yet the two can be reconciled only by the truth of the text, by the belief that the power of His Atonement is universal, in time as in space. It is easier comparatively to see how this divine salvation has power over the souls which consciously embrace it. But is this enough ? We wander over the earth, and see everywhere the traces of primeval man ; we open an Egyptian tomb, and the old historic world lives to us again in its splendour ; we look into our own customs, our institutions, and our language, and we find that heathen Greece and heathen Rome contribute, with the chosen people, the materials which make us what we are. We feel that all these are our brethren, children of the one Father. Can we think of them as hopelessly lost, for want of that which they could not have ? Can we suppose that they saved themselves, or had another Saviour ? There is a terrible story of a half-converted heathen, who

asked the missionary of his conversion, where are my heathen forefathers now? And when the rash, cruel answer came, "They are lost," the man turned away and said, "Your God is no God for me. Away with your salvation! Let my lot be cast with theirs." Thank God! we have learnt a higher lore. We repeat over and over again to ourselves, "Christ was sacrificed before the foundation of the world. They knew Him not: yet for these also He died." But is this a matter only of interest in the past? I think not. Think of the millions of heathen, far outnumbering even those who bear the name of Christ on the earth; look at the practical heathenism which overspreads such masses of human creatures, even in lands called Christian. Is it not an infinite comfort to repeat to ourselves, "Yet for these again He died." "Is there good in them? It is from Him. Is there hope for them? It is in His Cross."

My brethren, unless we can feel this, the perplexity would be too bewildering; yet if we hold it, where shall we find it so clearly set forth as in that great truth of the text? Blessed be God, who has called us to the higher state—higher in responsibility, yet higher far in blessedness—of knowing Him our Saviour; in that knowledge finding all our comfort, in His felt and acknowledged grace feeling and knowing our strength! Blessed be God for this, as for all other special mercies! But blessed be God, also, that in Christ He knows and saves those who know Him dimly and imperfectly, and accepts in every nation those who live up to the light that is given them, not for their own sakes, but through Jesus Christ our Lord!

One word more and I have done. Beyond all others it seems to me that this view of the Atonement raises up its protest against that forgetfulness of the love of God (whom men all the while call "the Father") as the source of the Atonement. It is not too much to say that many even of good men have spoken of Christ, not as a Mediator to lead us to a loving Father, but as a shield against an angry God; of the Cross, not as a redemption to God, but a redemption out of His hand. I say not that such thoughts need the conception of the text to put them down. The one word of comfort from our Lord's lips, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son," shatters them to pieces. But certainly this looking back to the primeval salvation in the counsels of eternity, enables us to see that the love of God, in the forgiveness of sin and conquest of death, is just as universal, just as primeval, even as that love in His creation and preservation of us, in which "we live and move and have our being." And, as we grasp this idea, wide and deep as the other, and coming home in nearer and more touching power to us who are sinners, we throw aside all that keeps the eternal mercy of the Father from us, and cry out with St. Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, are able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

III.

CHRIST OUR REDEEMER

(Tuesday before Easter.)

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MATTHEW XX. 28.

“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

IN these words, unfolding to us the Great Idea of Ransom or Redemption, lies the simplest and the most practical aspect of the great work of the Atonement. As yet, my brethren, in our meditations upon this subject, I have tried to show you only how this atoning work is needed, is cried out for, so to speak, by the various tones of “groaning” under sin, and “travailing” with aspiration after holiness, which rise up before the face of God ; and next how, even before the foundation of the world, these cries were heard by anticipation, and in the Divine foreknowledge the Atonement was made and accepted for all the race of mankind. But what the real nature of that work is (so far as it can be revealed to us) we have not yet ventured to inquire. Be it ours to-night reverently and thoughtfully to dwell upon the question, and to ask it from Him, who alone can answer it, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Two things only let me urge upon you before we consider this deep subject. And the first, is that no one view, no one metaphor, no one phrase of human language, can tell the whole of the Divine truth. Redemption, Propitiation, Mediation, and the like—these are, as it were, views of one great building, which “stands four-square to all the winds that blow.” We need to put them together, to blend, as in some spiritual stereoscope, these various aspects from different quarters; so only can the reality come out, solid to the grasp of our faith. It is because men have not remembered this, because they have taken one name or metaphor, and worked it out as if it contained the whole truth—as if the building were on every side a mere repetition of one design, instead of standing out, as your Cathedral stands out, rich in the harmony of various designs of beauty—it is because of this, that controversy has vexed the Church, that moral instincts of humanity have been contradicted, that the partial truth has been turned into a dangerous falsehood, and given occasion to the enemies of the Cross to blaspheme.

This is the first truth, and it needs to be pondered well; but the next far more. It is simply the truth, that if we would really understand what our Lord’s Atonement is, we must ask Him, and rest implicitly on His word. It is well, very well, to dwell on the various lines of witness before He came, which lead up to the truth—to tell how the witness of the law, the witness of prophecy, the witness of sacrifice, all converge to Him, each like a growing streak of the dawn, which tells that the sun is

soon to rise. But all these things just bring us to Christ, and nothing more. When they have done this, they go out, like the gray or rose of that dawn before the pure sunlight. And just so it was to those who saw our Lord ; so it is to us who see Him through their eyes as He was upon the earth, in respect of the visible signs of a super-human nature which clustered round Him. All the miracles of mercy and love, culminating in the final miracle of the Resurrection ; all the fulfilments of prophecy in them or in the words which He spake "as never man spake ;" all the unearthly purity and beauty of His life, of the morality which He taught, of the spirit which He breathed into His disciples—all these do but take up the earlier tale. They can tell us that He is of God, as they told even the wavering Nicodemus ; they can lead us to cry out with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." But they can do no more. For all else we must rest on His word ; we must ask Him reverently, "Who art Thou? What dost Thou work?" And when the answer comes, then must that Faith awake, which knows in whom it believes, and therefore believes Him ; and so, "rooted and grounded in faith," shall we come "to know that which passeth knowledge."

So it is in respect of His Nature and the whole meaning of His Incarnation ; so it is also in the special work of His Atonement. We can follow Him along the way of sorrows, leading Him to the Cross, which He foretold ; we can see that in that Divine Passion there is some awful significance, some crisis of His Redemptive work ;

we can cry out with the centurion, "Truly, this was the Son of God;" or like the multitude, when they were hushed from taunt and yell of hatred into an awestruck silence, "smite our breasts, and return" sadder and wiser home. All this (I say) we can do, even if He is silent; but if we would know the true meaning of what we see, if we would see in the measure of our power the shadowing out of the Divine reality, seen perfectly in the eternal counsels of God, we must simply ask Him. "The earthly things" of which He spoke to Nicodemus, the visible manifestations (that is) and signs, we can see; but, as He goes on to say, He alone can tell of "heavenly things—who ascended up to heaven, and came down from heaven," and yet, such is the mystery, was "in heaven" still.

So then in each of the aspects of the Atonement we shall take His own words for our starting-point, and group round them all the teaching of the Apostles, in whom He lived by grace, and through whom He spake, when He was exalted at the right hand of God. Much indeed we may suppose that He could not teach them, except in germ, during His sojourn on earth. Again and again, in that loneliness which enfolds all the leaders of mankind, but which in its fulness He alone could know, the thought must have risen in His soul, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." You may notice that not till just before the Transfiguration did He teach them even the approaching fact of His death, in words which for very love they could not and would not hear. Probably there was much in the

true story of the Atonement which, till the actual Passion and Resurrection were over, they could not understand : for such is the case, as we know, with most of God's deepest teaching in this life. But still in germ we do seem to gather from His words the great principles which, as the Holy Spirit wrought them out hereafter, make up to us the great doctrine of the Cross.

The first is the great principle of Redemption or ransom, which is spoken of in the text, as one chief object of His humiliation. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"—there speaks the story of His life—"and to give His life a ransom for many"—there speaks the true meaning of His death. No single idea of that great work has so taken hold of the souls of men. "Ransomed, redeemed, bought with a price,"—these words come back to us again and again from the pages of Holy Scripture. There is no name, except that general title of reverence calling Him "our Lord," by which we so constantly designate Him as the name of "our Saviour," "our Redeemer." Very certainly it denotes that He came to deliver us from some bondage, and to open the doors of some spiritual prison-house;¹ very clearly also it tells us that He did not so by any simple act of the omnipotent power of God, but that in His true humanity

¹ The word *λύτρον* is used again and again in the LXX. for the price of deliverance from penalty (see Ex. xxi. 30 ; Lev. xxv. 24, 51 ; Num. xxxv. 31). In the words *λυτρώμαι* and *λυτρωτής* we trace occasionally the more general idea of deliverance without the idea of redemptive price (see Ex. vi. 6 ; Ps. xix. 15 ; comp. Acts vii. 35).

He did it by sacrifice, even the sacrifice of His own precious life. But we must know more clearly what that bondage is ; and I cannot but think that if we ask this from the Scripture, in which Christ speaks through the Apostles by the gift of the Holy Ghost, or even if we ask it from the broad facts of the world's experience, we shall get a somewhat different answer from that which has been framed in some systems of formal theology.

Look for example at that great passage, on which for another reason I dwelt last night. "Ye were redeemed or ransomed" (says St. Peter¹) "not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." But from what? "Ye were redeemed from your vain conversation"—your life (that is) of vanity, bewildered and godless—which came "by tradition from your fathers," as an accumulated heritage of darkness, and so of sin. Or ask St. Paul in his great Epistle to the Romans—the crown of the four chief Epistles of the Cross. What does he tell us in his third chapter of the "Redemption in Christ Jesus?" It is (he says²) "a free justification" by the "remission of sins." What does he bid us look for in the great passage in his eighth chapter, on which we dwelt on Sunday? What is the "redemption of our body," except the deliverance from the "bondage of corruption," under which creation groans, "into the glorious liberty of the children of God."³ Will you go on with the same Apostle to those Epistles of the Captivity, which mark an even more advanced and profounder stage

¹ 1 Peter i, 19, 20.

² Rom. iii. 24, 25.

³ Rom. viii. 21—23.

of teaching? You shall find again, whether you look to the vivid sketch of the Colossian Epistle, or the finished picture of that which we call the Ephesian, that the "redemption" is formally defined, and that without argument, as unnecessary on a known truth, to be the remission of sins.¹ Will you consult those last Epistles of all, written to his beloved sons, Timothy and Titus, in that time of old age, when men gather up the results of their life's experience and concentrate them in changeless epitomes of truth? There you will find him come back again to the old phrase of the Lord Jesus, "gave Himself a ransom," only that the "many" of the original phrase had now swelled to the "all" which it really signifies;² but you will also find that the ransom is given "to redeem us from iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people."³ Will you lastly turn from the Epistles of his own hand and mind to that Epistle which we must, after all consideration, believe to be his in general inspiration, though not in authorship—the Epistle to the Hebrews? There you shall hear the same testimony again; the "redemption" of the new Covenant is the redemption "from the transgressions which were under the old,"⁴ and from which that old Covenant could promise, but could not give, deliverance. It is but another way of saying, what in this same context the Scripture does say, that "Christ's blood is to purge our conscience from dead works"—works with no spirit of life in them—works which bear in their bosom the seed of death—"to serve the living

¹ Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14.

² Titus ii. 14.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 6.

⁴ Heb. ix. 14, 15.

God." Will you ask for the voice of St. John, the fullest and deepest of the great Gospel harmony? He will tell you of the song to the Lamb in heaven, the song of thanksgiving to Him "who redeemed us to God by His blood," in order that we may be free, "kings" in spiritual might, "priests" in direct spiritual privilege, "before God for ever."¹

You will see, brethren, everywhere that the redemption is not merely from the penalty of sin, not merely from "the wrath to come," it is from sin itself—sin and the bondage which it weaves for the soul. Need I go about to prove to you that sin does exercise such a bondage? There is certainly a power of sin over the race. Call it "original sin" or "birth sin;" call it "the power of the flesh" or "of the devil;" call it by any of the more courteous names by aid of which the world shrinks from plain speaking. How it is—and why it is—Nature cannot tell us. But to know that it is, you have but to look at humanity in its narrowest and simplest, or in its widest and most mighty forms. Look, if you will, at the weak and innocent child, even when Christ has made him His. Do you need to corrupt him deliberately, as the servants of the Devil too often delight to do? No! only leave him alone, take away all discipline, let him have his way. The very parlance of the world will tell you that he will be "spoilt" and ruined—a plague to himself and to others. Whence came this, if it came not from some bondage of sin over his nature from the beginning? Or go to the other extreme. Read the history of man, as

¹ Rev. v. 9, 10.

it is broadly written. Read the history of heathendom in its ever-recurring decay and corruption ; read the story even of Christian civilization, although here the marvellous regenerating spirit breaks out again and again to become the life of the world ; read the very history of the Church of Christ itself, with its strifes and heresies, its schism and its apostasies ; or, if you will not read, look round you at the Christian Church as it is now, at the most civilized of European nations, as we have seen them in this last fatal year and see them still. Is it not true that the great landmarks of history are the blood-red marks of wars, of tyrannies, of rebellions, so that, like the prophetic volume, it is "written within and without with lamentations and mourning and woe?" The Bible in its stern and searching truthfulness may tear off some of the coverings, and scatter the rose-coloured clouds by which we delight to hide these things from us ; but it is not needed to reveal the fact of the bondage—a bondage which eats into the soul.

But turn from original sin to the sins of actual commission by ourselves. What means that power of evil habit of which men talk lightly, a power so well known in its existence, but so unspeakably mysterious in its theory? The Word of God will tell you that it is a slavery to sin, a self-chosen power of Satan over the soul. It is visible in various degrees in different forms of sin. Everyone knows and trembles at it, when it is seen, like a demoniacal possession over the fornicator or the drunkard. But more silent and more subtle, yet, if possible, more deadly, it is in more spiritual sins ; over

the liar, who cannot tell the truth when he will; over the cheat, to whom honesty has lost all beauty and all zest; over the tyrant, who is debauched by his own tyranny; over the tormentor, who, even in childish days, is drawn by a fiendish delight into cruelty. Shall I need to tell you how profaneness and blasphemy, or even the contempt of prayer and ignoring of the presence of God—how they spread, like a coating of ice, over the spirits of men? Even if it be melted by God's grace, too often it congeals again and again; and, even if it be torn away by His mercy at last, it seems to tear away with it half the life of the soul.

There is a bondage of sin, as sure and as real as if you saw the fetters with your eyes. Some we seem to see struggling against it, it may be snapping some of their chains, it may be only making them bite into the bleeding flesh. Some, bearing them with an abject patience, gilding them, perhaps, that they may seem an ornament, and gradually paralysed by their ever-tightening grasp. Some, hugging them for themselves, and then delighting to rivet them on others, as true slaves of the Devil himself. But in one way or another the bondage is too terribly real. It is from this that the Lord Himself, the Son of God, came to deliver us in His life and in His death. He came to minister to the captives, naked, bleeding, chained in the prison-house of sin, or dragged in the triumphal procession of the Prince of Darkness; He came to give His own life for their ransom, that they might have the bleeding of their wounds staunched, and their nakedness clothed in the wedding garment of the King,

that their chains might fall off, and their limbs, palsied and benumbed by sin, be renewed by the Divine strength of His grace.

This is the Deliverance or Redemption, on which the true teaching of the Gospel lays the most frequent and the most emphatic stress. We destroy the proportion of the faith, if we put not this in the foreground, if we even seem to hail the Redemption as saving us from sin's penalty and not from sin itself. But yet this is not all. You may ask, "Why should this be by His Incarnation and Death? Why should not one act of Omnipotent grace strike down the Power of Darkness, and set the captives free?" Then, brethren, I must tell you of another bondage, which lies, as it were, behind the bondage of Sin. It is the bondage of death—"the curse of the law." Far less often spoken of in Holy Scripture—far less familiar to our experience, because it lies out of the broad daylight of this world, yet still it is real, and it is revealed to us in its measure. Most clearly was the sense of it borne in on the mind of St. Paul in the great crisis of his struggle against Judaism, for the freedom and eternity of the Gospel. Look to the Galatian Epistle; and, though the word used is not precisely that of our Lord in the text, yet substantially he does but carry on the truth which that word declared.¹ There is (he says) a bondage, laying death upon those who are under the Law; there is "a curse of the Law"—the Law which declares "the soul that sinneth it shall die."

¹ See Gal. iii. and iv., especially iii. 13, iv. 3—7. The word used is *ἀγοράζω*, not *λυτρώομαι*, as in Rev. v. 9, 10 (quoted above).

What is that Law? It is the will of God, as it is seen by sinners, who look at it without sympathy and love, and behold it moving upon them, like some great cloud of thunder or of pestilence, which they watch helplessly, as it bears with it the inevitable death. Can it take away sin? Can it by its approach loosen the chains of the soul? No! on the contrary, there is in it, so far as it is mere law, a double bondage. There is a slavery, even in our obedience to it through hope or fear; it seems to check our freedom, and so the true development of our humanity; at every point it meets us with stern prohibition, or with oppressive compulsion; the Fatherhood of God is lost in the awful impassiveness of the Almighty Lawgiver. But the real crushing effect on the soul lies in the feeling that, as mere law, we cannot obey it; that its voice does not tell us the way of life, but pronounces merely the sentence of death. Turn to the greater epistle of this same crisis, the Epistle to the Romans; turn to the seventh chapter—that chapter of despair. “The law is holy and just and good;” its essence belongs to the Spirit; it awakens an echo of delight in the higher nature of man. It is impossible to doubt that it is God’s will, and that therefore it must be irresistible. But, all the while, the power of sin in the heart only rebels against it the more, just as desperate men hurl their weapons wildly against an inaccessible breach, from which issues their death. The bondage of sin is felt, not only as full of pain, but full of a sure destruction. But the misery is only greater; the cry of

anguish rises up to heaven : " O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body "—this gross solid reality of a foreseen " death ? "

It rises up, and does it rise in vain ? No ! there comes an answer ; there is a Deliverer from the bondage of death as well as the bondage of sin. " Christ was made a curse for us ; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. " The eye turns not to Christ only, but to Christ crucified. " I thank God, " we cry out in exultation, " through Jesus Christ our Lord. "

What means all this ? It means that death is " the wages " earned by sin, wrung, if I may so say, from an unwilling God ; and that, unless man cease to be man, unless our freedom, the germ of all true goodness, is taken away, God cannot loose the chains of bondage which man has forged for himself. Death of the body—it is the separation from the body of that indwelling life which God has breathed into it for His glory, and which the sinner has used to affront His majesty. Death of the soul—it is the separation of the spirit of man from that indwelling Spirit who stamps His image upon it, and makes man truly the son of God. It is not only the wages of sin—it is, so to speak, merely the effecting for ever of that which sin desires. Sin is the turning away from God, to worship self or the world or Satan, and in the slavery of such worship to bind the soul, and the body as the soul's instrument. Death is the granting the sinner his desire, and sending the desolation and horror of utter loneliness into the soul. It is the awful sentence : " He is joined to his idols : let him

alone." It needs only the "outer darkness" of alienation from God, and deadness of the reprobate spirit ; it needs, I say, nothing else, to bring out "the weeping" of hopeless loss, the "gnashing of the teeth" of despair.

Is there, then, no deliverance ? Yes ! but there must be a Son of man "who shall give His life a ransom for many." It was needful (He tells us) that God should take upon Him our nature, not as it would have been in innocence, full of beauty and dignity and happiness, growing in unbroken spiritual progress, for a heaven which had no portal of death ; but as it is now, under the bondage of sin and death. The sinless One was to take the likeness of sinful flesh ; "to be made sin for us, though He knew no sin." It was needful (so God's inscrutable wisdom ordained) that He should be born a little child, as we are born, to take our nature and purify it by His very touch ; it was needful that He should live that perfect human life—perfect in its own intrinsic purity—perfect in its righteousness and love to men—perfect in its unbroken and indestructible communion with God ; it was needful that He should do what no man, strictly speaking, can do—lay down his life freely under the law of human death, and by that sacrifice ransom mankind from sin and death for ever ; so that the Resurrection of Easter, the Ascension of the fortieth day, should be literally the deliverance from spiritual death now, the earnest of the Resurrection which shall conquer death of body and soul hereafter, the opening of the heaven where the ransomed shall be free for ever. All this was needful ; it was part of the Mediation, the reconciling

of God and man, on which we dwell hereafter. So only can man's self-chosen bondage by man be broken. Such is the only ransom which shall let the many go free.

If we ask again, How can this be? How can man ransom man? The answer must be, "Christ only knows." Faint analogies we have, of men gladly sacrificing all that they have to save and to convert others, laying down their very lives in the cause, and counting it but as a little thing. But they are far, very far, from covering the whole area of comparison. How often we say mournfully with the Psalmist, "No man can deliver his brother, or make atonement unto God for him!" But if He, our Lord and Saviour, tells us that it is so, surely it is reason as well as faith which makes us accept His words.

It often seems to me that it is here as with some great law of Nature. We gain some slight suggestions of it by experiment; we conceive, usually through the mind of some great genius, the law in its completeness; and then we turn and verify it by examining its results. So is it in the great truths of God. Our own experience does give us some faint, partial, inadequate suggestions of them. When the Revelation of God, especially through the voice of Christ Himself, takes these up, and opens a truth far beyond what we could have conceived, it remains for us simply to verify them by results, to look into the facts of life, and see whether these things are so.

We need not surely fear the test here.

The redemption of Christ is brought home to the soul: then comes in again the freedom of man. The soul

must accept it and act upon it, or it will be vain to us—vain as freedom to a prisoner palsied in body or in mind by long captivity. The Son of man has delivered the race; but on each individual life there still rests the great indivisible, inalienable responsibility to accept that freedom, consciously in Christ, or unconsciously in dimmer knowledge of God; still the great saying is true, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

But, again I say, look to the results. Surely it is true (God be thanked for it!) that when we do accept His atonement with our whole hearts, and trust in God’s love through Him, the bondage of sin is broken every day. It may be suddenly, it may be gradually; but broken it most surely is. Simple men and women, weak children in age or in knowledge, do, as a matter of fact, live in Christ, and Christ in them; till sin is gradually trampled down, till the soul is ready for heaven.

Ay, and even that other first bondage of the law, the sense, that is, of God’s service as a yoke to be borne, made heavy by the lingering power of sin, and by the fear of death,—even this also, though so long as we are sinful it will cling to us, even this gradually passes away; its chains grow thinner and thinner, till they seem to vanish, only to return again, if sin drags us down from the spiritual height of love. Love more and more casts out fear. We ask not, “What must we do to be saved?” but, “What may we do for Christ?” We feel more and more the power of the Spirit, through the constraining love of God in Christ; we long more and more for the time when it shall be made perfect in heaven.

But what shall we say of the other bondage of the law, the terror of the sentence of death? Surely from this also we are redeemed in Christ. That death of the body ceases to us to be a terror; rather it is a deliverance from the burden of the flesh, "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." And as for the death of the spirit, the true "wages of sin," even though we feel our own sinfulness, yet we know that "there is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus;" we "have not received the spirit of bondage to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Not to Apostles and Saints only, but to the poorest, simplest Christian this freedom is given, for the sake of Him who "gave Himself a ransom for many."

It is from Him alone: we learn more and more to feel that this freedom is of Christ, and not of us; we learn to wash away our sins daily in His blood; we learn to lose our weakness in His strength. Free from sin, free from the law, free from the power of death, we know that it is through the ransom that He has paid for us, and take up with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, that glorious song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!"

IV.

CHRIST OUR PROPITIATION.

(Wednesday before Easter.)



IV.

CHRIST OUR PROPITIATION.

(Wednesday before Easter.)

MATTHEW XXVI. 28.

“This is My blood of the new Covenant which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.”

AGAIN, my brethren, we come to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, to read in them another lesson of the Cross. Words they are much more solemn, far more emphatically spoken, than those on which we dwelt last night. They were uttered at a time when the shadow of the Cross already fell on the Holy Table of the Last Supper, when the suspense of an unknown sorrow deepened the thoughtfulness of the disciples, and when the knowledge that these were nearly His last words to them made them hang more than ever on His lips. And accordingly the view of the Atonement which they open to us is more mysterious than the one which last night we sought, under His teaching, to consider. For in that conception of Redemption, we started from a bondage of sin—the sin of our nature and the sin of our own action—which we see and feel and know to be

real, visibly and painfully real, and from which we cry to God for deliverance. The initiative of salvation is wholly from God, when our cry is answered in His exceeding love. These chains of sin are not His will ; mankind forged them for themselves in the beginning ; we forge them anew every day, each in the workshop of his own life. But God's part in redemption is one of full and free mercy. "Why will ye die, ye house of Israel," cries the prophet in God's name, "seeing that I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God?" Such was the pleading even of the Old Testament, but how much more of the New ! What is the picture which the Gospel reveals, but the picture of God in Christ "reconciling the world"—the estranged and bewildered world—"to Himself," striking off its chains at once, or bidding them gradually grow thin and fall away. We, His ministers, feel that here we speak in the name of simple love and mercy. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." We have but to bid you come forth out of the prison-house of sin, ere the inevitable crushing weight of death fall upon you. It is the will of your Father, it is the very object and purpose of the manifestation of love in the Incarnate Saviour, that "not one of you should perish."

This message, brethren, it is joy to utter and joy to hear. Our own heart tells us that it is worthy of God's love. But the other aspect, which our Lord's words in the text open to us, the idea symbolized in that rite of sacrifice on which by those words He sets the stamp of

His authority, seems far darker and more difficult. In it He is emphatically the Son of Man, gathering up in Himself the personality of all the human race ; in it we seem to see that now the initiative must come from man, not from God. There must be (it seems) a sacrifice offered ; the life of the Saviour is to be poured out, before God's forgiveness can be shed upon His children, before the guilt of the world can be taken away. Men ask, Why should this be needful? We pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." If we are to forgive freely and without price, even seventy times seven, can we doubt that God will forgive? Is it not a mere superstition still to dream of atonement or sacrifice?

The question is not unreasonably, not irreverently asked ; because so far as our natural knowledge goes, there are two voices sounding in our ears and contradicting each other, the one with the bright strains of hope, the other with the sadder accents of doubt and of fear. If we look to what we call Nature and its laws, there seems little forgiveness. Violate the laws of well-being or of health, no repentance will keep death from you ; waste in reckless folly your time, your talents, your wealth, your opportunities ; many a voice of remorse, many a wreck stranded on the shore of time, cries out that there is no undoing the past. "What I have written," says the angel of Retribution, "I have written." Nor is this true of individual lives only ; it is true with a larger, though vaguer truth, of nations and of Churches. There are laws of society which even for the noblest objects it is utter ruin to break ; there is a

point in the progress of folly, sin, degradation, when any resurrection of a nation's life seems impossible. There is a time when even the earnest prayers, the almost agonized efforts, of reformers cannot rekindle the quenched candlestick of a Church. Yet it is God's hand which rules in all these things. The voice which sounds from Nature and from History is indirectly His ; and it tells us that it is not so easy, not so certain that He can forgive.

But then, on the other hand, comes in the voice of our own hearts, and it will be heard, when it tells us that somehow there must be forgiveness. Fathers even of disobedient children, children even of cruel or unrighteous fathers, do they not forgive again and again ? Is there any story so true to life as the Prodigal Son ? Is there any prayer like the "Father, forgive them" of the dying Saviour, or the "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" of the martyr, who saw that Saviour in his last hour, and through the opened heaven caught His Divine spirit of unfailing love ? There must be forgiveness ; and yet once more, is there not an experience of the Judge, the Ruler, even the Father, which tells us how hard it is to forgive without penalty ? Every judge who reads the terrible sentence of death feels his voice falter almost with terror ; but he must read on. Every sovereign hears cries for pardon of the criminal, and yet for righteousness, even for mercy's sake he must often turn his face away. Many a father, though his heart be bleeding for the offender, may be forced to look unyielding on a child's tears, and dares not make all one, innocent and guilty,

dutiful and rebellious alike. We read of an Italian saint who, when an assassin, enraged at some reform of abuse which he had made, struck at his life and only missed it by an hair's breadth, actually embraced the murderer and forgave him. He might do it, though we almost doubt whether even he was right, in a noble desire to fulfil literally the Sermon on the Mount; for he was but as an equal pardoning an equal. But the authorities of his city dared not use this heavenly luxury of forgiveness; they seized the murderer, and made him expiate the crime with his life. We see that, just in proportion as men come near to the sovereignty which is the shadow of God's almighty rule, their forgiveness is barred. What shall we think of the forgiveness of God Himself?

Surely we must be aware that there is perplexity, there is difficulty of decision, between these two voices within; we want some voice which shall strike boldly in, to cut the knot of this spiritual perplexity. And such a voice I seem to hear in the saying of our Lord—of One who could speak for God, and yet speak in the language of man. He says in effect, "Forgiveness there must be, and there shall be; but there must also be an atonement for guilt." "There is a remission of sins in the New Covenant, but that New Covenant must be sealed in My blood."

In so saying, my brethren, He does, as I have already said, set the stamp of His Divine sanction on that great primeval rite of sacrifice. You know how it has asserted itself in every race and every age of man, with an irrepressible and inextinguishable power. Not even the

leprous crust of superstition, terrible or puerile, which spread over it; not that horror of blood-shedding, especially of spilling the blood of man, which is at once our most natural instinct, and our most reasonable principle; not the protest of those who took their stand on the love of God, and asked how sacrifice could be needed or accepted by that Love—none of those things could ever destroy it.

The rite itself stands out like the Melchizedek who is the great impersonation of the priesthood which depends on it, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life."

You know, moreover, how the Lord Jehovah Himself, through the Law and the Prophets of the older Covenant, took up this rite of sacrifice, and stamped it as His own. But perhaps you may not have observed the emphatic difference, which separated the sacrifices of Israel from the sacrifices of the heathen world. The heathens felt truly a separation from God; but they thought that man should bridge it over; that they themselves must (so to speak) bring back by their own inventions the favour of an estranged and offended God, and, as in the old Roman story, fill up the great gulf by casting in it their most precious things. Costly hecatombs, human sacrifices, were their logical conclusion. "Wherewith (they asked) shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself to the most high God? Will He be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit

of my body for the sin of my soul?" But the Lawgiver and the Prophets of Israel taught a nobler wisdom than this. They showed God Himself originating and authorizing the sacrifice, not for its costliness but for its significance, recognising the separation, but in promise already bridging it over, as in the great reality of the One True Sacrifice He was to fill it up once and for ever. It was not that God's face was for an instant turned away, or that His love could for a moment fail; but there was a separation which man's sin had made, and in the sacrifice which He ordained that separation would be done away. You see the world-wide difference. They say that Moses in his Law and his ritual laid the hand of authority on the institutions of Egypt, and took what God ordered that he should take from them. But, as he took it, he made it pass through the fire of purification; he stamped it with the one all-changing and all-dominating stamp of the great Jehovah, making Him the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

Yet Moses was but a servant, and "the servant knoweth not," save in part, "what his lord doeth." The rite of sacrifice was written in letters of light by the hand of God, but those letters were like the letters on Belshazzar's wall. They were seen to be from God; they had some great significance, but not yet could they be read. Our Lord, in the words of the Last Supper, threw a light indeed onward to the mysterious sacramental grace of the Church, of which here we cannot speak; but what is to our purpose is, that He threw a light back on the meaning of sacrifice when He said, "This is My

blood of the new Covenant, shed for the remission of sins."

Remember that these words were spoken to Jews, whose whole minds were impregnated with the ideas of sacrifice, and spoken at that Passover, the inaugural sacrifice of the Mosaic dispensation, in which all the three great ideas and types of sacrifice were indissolubly bound up. There is in sacrifice first the simple, beautiful idea of the peace- or thank-offering, a homage to a loving and beloved God, like the present to a father of that which, by the father's gift, the child can call his own. There is the nobler idea of the burnt-offering, the dedication of self, soul and body, to God, even unto death, such as in each Holy Communion we solemnly render day by day. But gradually, under and through these, there comes out the mysterious idea of the sin-offering, through which guilt is pardoned, and remission of sins is given. Last in time it comes, but first in idea ; as the granite, last uncovered to man's search, is the primeval stratum on which in the order of creation the rest were laid. Now it needs but a glance at the old ritual of Israel to see that in the Passover all the forms of sacrifice meet together. The eating of the flesh marked the peace-offering ; the consuming of the whole was the essence of the burnt-offering ; the use of the blood was precisely that which made the sin-offering symbolical. As the Apostles at the Passover went back in thought to the night of the great cry of Egypt, of the unseen passage of the destroyer on the silent air of the night, of the mighty deliverance which set Israel free—free from the pollutions as from the bondage of Egypt—

they must have gathered up in feeling, if not in thought, all the whole mystery of sacrifice. And when the Lord Himself took the cup and declared, "This is My blood," this it is which is "shed for the true remission of sins," it was no wonder that they understood anew the old declaration, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and that the Holy Scripture afterwards told how "Christ was our true Passover," "Christ, the one sacrifice for us." Soon they were to see, in preparation for that sacrifice, the willing victim bound and led to the altar. They who could bear it and dare it stood, some afar off, some at the foot of the Cross, to see the Sacrifice itself. It may well be that they understood it not yet: the darkness which hung over the Cross must have brooded over their souls; the cry which rang out of that darkness may have sounded to them like a knell of their hope and faith: but when the solemn words, "It is finished," awakened higher thoughts, and when in the sad dreariness of the first Easter Eve they pondered over all that they had seen and heard, surely then the words of the Last Supper must have come back to them, and they must have felt (as St. John certainly felt¹) that His blood poured out had a mysterious meaning, because it was "shed indeed for the remission of their sins."

Few and simple as these words are, they contain the whole idea of the sacrifice of the Atonement, spoken by Him who, as again I remind you, brethren, alone has the power and right to speak, because He at once knows

¹ See John xix. 34, 35.

what is the nature and the condition of man, and what is the whole loving and gracious purpose of God. Certainly He speaks decisively and unmistakeably. He tells us emphatically that sacrifice is no superstition, that forgiveness without atonement is not, and cannot be, the law of God's dealings with man. He tells us that His death, the completion of the long Humiliation and Passion of His life, is the sacrifice which is needed, and which shall avail for ever. Carefully, and, if I may say so, jealously, He guards us against the notion that the sacrifice is devised by man, and not originated from the love of God. When He speaks of Himself as "lifted up, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life," He adds in the same breath that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son."¹ When He tells hereafter of giving His flesh and blood for the life of the world, He tells them instantly that they who come to Him, come not of themselves, but are "drawn" by the love of the Father.² Nay, even when He speaks of His future mediation in heaven, He cannot refrain from adding, "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you."³ But still, all the while, He will have us see that sacrifice is a necessity and a reality, and that in the shedding of His blood lies the condition "of the remission of sins through the tender mercy of our God."

Certainly, they who heard Him, and they who knew Him through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, had

¹ John iii. 14—16.

² John vi. 44—51.

³ John xvi. 26, 27.

no doubt of His meaning. The first preaching naturally and reverently took up His very words. In the Pentecostal address to the people, before the Sanhedrim, and at the great conversion of the Gentiles in Cornelius, through the voice of St. Peter—in the preaching to Jews and Gentiles both at Antioch, in Pisidia, and in the pleading before the judgment-seat of Agrippa, through the voice of St. Paul—it is exactly this His own phrase, “the remission of sins” in Him, which is preached to all.¹

But gradually the plainer and more emphatic sacrificial language was made to unfold the implicit meaning and fix it upon the heart. To trace it perfectly would be almost to quote the whole of the New Testament. Only to two great Epistles can I here direct your thoughts, glancing at them now, and praying you to read them, not piecemeal in texts, but each as a whole, for yourselves at home.

Turn to the great Epistle to the Romans—the crown (as I have reminded you) of the four epistles of that time, in which St. Paul declares that he cares “not to know anything but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” That whole idea of “justification,” or “pardon of sins,” which runs through the whole Epistle, and which is the very citadel of the freedom of the Gospel—men call it “forensic,” and believe it drawn wholly from the judgment-seat and the law-court; but I turn to its introduction in the third chapter, and I find it at least stamped with the idea of sacrifice. “We are justified

¹ See Acts ii. 38; v. 31; x. 43; xiii. 38; xxvi. 18.

freely by God's grace, through the redemption of Christ Jesus ;" but it is because "God has set Him forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood."¹ That word "propitiation" is the very word specially fixed on the sin-offering of the old covenant ;² it is the very word by which the publican in the parable, standing far off while the sacrifice is offered, in sense of guilt, in sense of helplessness, cries out, "God be propitious to me a sinner ;"³ it is the very word which, in the twenty-fifth Psalm, cries to God, "For Thy name's sake"—that is, for Thine own essential nature of love—"let my sin be atoned for, for it is great."⁴ The sense could not be mistaken, as gathering up in it the deepest mystery of sacrifice. Nor was it a word used only by St. Paul, in this great crisis of the Gospel. Turn to the most perfect, the most fully developed form of apostolic teaching, in the Epistle of St. John. You shall read there of "Jesus Christ the righteous : He is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." You shall read there the faithful echo of our Lord's own words as to the original love of the Father : "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."⁵

Now, this word is one which we must not, we dare not, in order to avoid mystery, explain away. It does most certainly imply a change in the relation of God to man. I do not say a change in God's will or His eternal love to

¹ Rom. iii. 24, 25.

² See Lev. vi. 30, &c.

³ Luke xviii. 13.

⁴ Ps. xxv. 12.

⁵ 1 John ii. 2 ; iv. 10.

man ; but I do say, a change in our state and in our relation to God. So I know that the sun is always shining, but yet I say "it comes out" when the clouds open, because there is a real change, not in it, but in my power to receive its warmth. Why this change should be wrought in one special way,—why it was needful that God should become man, and as man should die,—I can at least but dimly guess. But, if words mean anything, so our Lord's words declare it, and so the Apostles interpret that great declaration. We accept them in faith ; we find in them an authoritative solution of an inscrutable problem, an ending of that strife of the two voices in us ; and (as I said yesterday) we can verify this by their fruits, we can know by Christian faith and experience that the "blood of Jesus Christ," and it only, does really "cleanse us from sin."

There is one other Epistle to which the Church herself at this moment calls your special attention. The time would fail me, even to represent by specimens the teaching of the Epistle of Sacrifice, the Epistle to the Hebrews. You must remember that the chief part of the Epistle (in the first eight chapters) seems to dwell rather on Christ as our Priest than Christ as our Sacrifice. But from the ninth chapter onwards that sacrifice is brought out, again and again, in every aspect, as the one real thing of which the others are but shadows. Perhaps you may have observed that it is emphatically interpreted by the sacrifice of the great day of Atonement,—that sacrifice of the goat slain, and the scape-goat left alive to bear away the burden of sin, which of all others is the

most solemn and the most strange and mysterious. The whole idea, reiterated again and again, is that the very Holy of Holies is open to us now, in order that every soul may live in the unveiled light and love of God ; but again and again we are told that it is the sacrifice of Christ's own blessed self which has rent the veil, and brought us into the very central shrine of communion with God. Emphatically, Christ's sacrifice is preached as a real propitiation. If it were held to be but symbolical, the whole Epistle would be unmeaning, its whole antithesis absurd and false.

Brethren, I set these Epistles before you, not as adding to, but simply as explaining the great declaration of our Lord in the text. That declaration may seem to you mysterious. I trust that it does so ; for I have no faith in any system, in any theory of life, which has no mystery in it. Think what mystery really is. It is mostly, if not always—what certainly it is here—the putting together two truths, each of which we know, though how they can be reconciled and harmonized we know not. Such mystery meets us everywhere ; to recognise it in science and in politics, as well as in religion, is the one great condition of all true knowledge. It must be so ; for it accords with the nature of man and of life, finite in actual nature, infinite in capacity, tied by the body to the earth and linked to the brute creation, and yet with a soul which can never rest until it rises to heaven and knows God.

But though it be a mystery, yet surely it is no unpractical one. You know, right well, even by your own consciousness, that sins do not pass away, that the past

never dies. Are there not times when memory, exposed to the fire of trial, yields up the hidden writing which seemed to have faded out? Have you not heard or known of men who in the brief agony of drowning, or the awful thrill of danger, have felt their past life come out again in one flash of an unearthly light? Have you not understood what every poet has painted to us, the childhood that comes back to the old man on the brink of the grave, and the memories, more real to him than what he sees, which crowd round his dying bed? Is all this an illusion? No! They say that each sound uttered, each light kindled, spreads its undying undulations through all the universe. So is it in the sphere of the spirit. Be sure that your acts can never be as though they had not been; your sins cannot, through any laws of nature and humanity, wholly pass away. Yet you cannot but feel that God's love must forgive them, must wipe them out. Else better were it that we had never been born; else is it impossible that He can be what we mean by God. He would be like the Zeus of the old Greek tragedy, physically the superior, but morally the inferior, of the being whom he had chained, hopeless and helpless, to the rock. Each truth is real and certain to you. Can you bring them together in harmony? Can you know all God's mind and solve the mystery?

No! but there is One who can, even He who spake these words, on which we have so long dwelt to-night. And they who accept His teaching, and lean on His Atonement, they feel in peace and regeneration of their souls that His words are true; they find in this mystery

the only key to the perplexities and burdens of life. Truly this is enough : leave all else to Him. The voices of thousands speak on earth, the voices of thousands who are gone speak to us from their graves ; and all take up and swell the One Voice divine, eternal, infinite—sounding now through the centuries of the world's life, destined to sound hereafter from the great white Throne : “ The new, the eternal Covenant between God and man is in the Cross, through the blood shed for you and for all for the remission of sins.”

V.

CHRIST OUR MEDIATOR.

(Thursday before Easter.)



V.

CHRIST OUR MEDIATOR.

(Thursday before Easter.)

JOHN XIV. 20.

"At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me,
and I in you."

IN these words once more our blessed Lord Himself sets forth to us that final truth of His Mediation, which is indeed the Alpha and Omega, the very essence of Christianity, and of which the Incarnation and the Atonement, the Resurrection and the Gift of Pentecost, are four distinct stages of manifestation. We have heard from His own lips already those two great aspects of the Atonement in itself—the Redemption from sin and death, in which the initiative is from God's love, and from it alone—the sacrifice of the Son of Man, ordained indeed in that same Divine love, but in the action of which it seems that the initiative comes from humanity. In the one, "God is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself;" in the other, mankind is (to use St. Paul's remarkable expression) "gathered into one head in Christ,"¹ offering the great

¹ See Eph. i. 10.

sacrifice, and so entering through the veil into the very presence of the Lord. But both these are but parts of the great truth of Mediation, which the text sets forth, so clearly and yet so profoundly. "Christ is in the Father, and the Father in Him." "We are in Christ, and He is in us." Therefore is He able to mediate, to make, that is, a real spiritual bond of union between man and God. This is (as I have said) the ultimate truth, the deepest of all; and accordingly we find it especially declared by St. John. Again and again, it is true, the Atoning Death of our dear Lord and Master is recurred to in his Gospel. Look at the great discourse to Nicodemus in the third chapter, and the comparison of the brazen serpent lifted up before the eyes of the perishing Israelites, to the lifting up of the Lord, in the likeness of sin, to take sin away. Look at the yet greater discourse at Capernaum, in the sixth chapter, and the prophecy of the "flesh and blood of Christ given for the life of the world." Look at the well-known parable of the Good Shepherd, in the tenth chapter; where to the old familiar picture of the Shepherd, as David in Israel could draw Him, is added the feature, which the New Testament alone discloses; "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." But still the death of Christ for us, either as an act of Redemption or an act of Sacrifice, is, so to speak, taken for granted, in order that emphasis may be laid on the yet greater truth, by which the meaning of His death must be unfolded. To "dwell in Christ and Christ in us," "to be one with Christ and Christ with us"—the truth which St. Paul appropriated to his own personal expe-

rience when he said, "To me to live is Christ," and "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"—this is the great doctrine of Mediation, in all its length and breadth and height, on which, so far as may be, I must this night call you to dwell.

Bear with me, brethren, if I by necessity lay some burden on your attention and your thought. It cannot be that sermons shall always be addressed merely to excite emotion, or merely to enforce and rekindle with a new life the duties of morality. The truths of Christian doctrine must be in their due measure dwelt upon, and the call for some strain of thought, which is freely responded to in the school or the lecture-room, must not be wholly refused when it comes from the pulpit. Be sure that if ever the direct teaching of the deeper truths of Christianity is silent in places like this; if men come to church to worship and to listen "with the spirit" only, and not "with the understanding also"—be sure that then the Church has begun to waver in her high duty of proclaiming her Master; be sure that the Gospel is losing its hold on the thought, the intelligence, and the inmost life of our people. To-night I ask you to meditate on our Lord's teaching, even where it is difficult because it is deep, so that tomorrow, in the sight of the Cross itself, the mind may be at leisure from thought, to adore Him our Redeemer, our Propitiation, and our Mediator, and simply to ask how we shall "glory in the Cross," by imprinting it on our souls and on our lives.

Perhaps the greatest of all difficulties in the conception of our Lord's Mediation is the difficulty of reconciling

any such action on the soul with the perfect freedom and responsibility of man, and so with the individual justice and righteousness of God. How can one (it is asked) take off from his brother's soul the burden that lies upon it? How can he release him from a spiritual bondage? How can he take away the guilt of his sin? Each of us is alone before God; to his own Master he stands or falls: what need of any Mediator between us and Him? How can any one be really a Mediator, that is be really "one with us, as we with Him"?

Now, my brethren, I would say to you boldly that this view of life is not a true one. I grant that man is in one sense alone in his individual life; but in another, "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." He is not alone; at every moment others exercise on him what is in the widest sense "mediation," that is, determine his life and his character, and so affect necessarily the relation in which he stands to God. Put away all theory for a moment, and look to facts. Ask, each one of you, your own experience. What you are at this moment depends partly on that individual character and power and talent, which God's hand has impressed on your own soul, and which none can know or can alter; but partly also on a thousand influences which it is hard adequately to sum up. There is the influence of the family into which you were born, the teaching and example of parent or of brother; there is the influence of the country of which you are members, its freedom and its government, its glories and its sins; there is the influence of the generation, the "spirit of the age," as we call it, which exercises

a very different power over you now from that which you would have felt had you lived fifty years ago, from that which Englishmen will feel when fifty years more have rolled away ; there is the influence even of the particular class to which you belong, of the special occupation in life which you follow ; for all classes and all professions have their special temptations and special blessings. Above all, there is the great influence of Christianity, as it exists in your nation and in your Church. For your very entrance into that Church you depended upon others, and as you grow up its institutions and character tell upon you every day, not only in the broad Christian sense, but even in the special peculiarities of particular Christian bodies. There is a tone (we say) of the Church of England, of Romanism, of Nonconformity ; each man, supposing him of the same natural character, power, and faith, is still affected differently by the chance (as it seems to be) of the particular Christian Church in which his lot is cast. In all these, and a thousand other ways, it is quite clear that the action of other spirits does most powerfully influence our own. We live in one great system of mediation ; we are always in different degrees receiving or giving out influence. Some, the weaker and the less vivid characters, receive far more than they give ; they are at the mercy of their fellow-men, they take up the opinions, the language, even the cries of their class or their age, till their very individuality seems lost. They are (as I have heard it said) not voices, but mere echoes to repeat the voices of others. Some again, the leaders of human kind, are blessed in that they

give far more than they receive. The words they speak go on echoing like thunder among the hills, the influence which they exercise widens out like the circles on a river, till its waves wash the whole shore of humanity. But all in different degrees are under both laws. They mediate for others ; they are mediated for by them.

And I would have you notice, brethren, next, that this power of mutual influence depends on the fact of a common nature, and varies just in proportion to the unity existing between us. With no community of thought and nature any such mutual action would be impossible. I can speak to you and influence your minds at this moment, because you and I have common ideas, experiences, instincts—in one word, a common nature. If I could not appeal to these, I should simply speak to the air. The voice of some great book speaks to age after age, long after the writer's hand and brain are dust, just in proportion as it goes down deep into that still water of common human nature, which underlies all the currents and waves of change. The old saying of the Latin poet, "I am a man, and therefore nothing human is quite alien to me," expresses the great truth that this mediation depends on some community between man and man.

Nor will it be hard to see that the degree of such influence depends on the degree of unity between us. There are unities of blood : clearly our own family tell far more upon us than strangers, our own neighbours far more than those at a distance, our own countrymen there than all the world besides, our fellow-Christians a thousandfold more than the heathen, our fellow-Church-

men more than those who are separated from us by the wretchedness of religious division. Then there are again unities in principle and in character. Life is full of associations which mere harmony of spirit makes. The close tie of friendship to those who are as our own soul; the yet closer tie, riveted by what we call especially "love" in the sacredness of wedlock; the glad reverence of a learner to a teacher, in whom he finds the wisdom that his soul needs; the sympathy in matters social, political, ecclesiastical, spiritual, between those who have the same objects and thoughts, the same loyalties, and the same faiths—all these again form different closenesses of union, and in proportion to them is the real power of ourselves over our fellow-men and of our fellow-men over us. The principle is clear. Some unity there must be for mediation, and the degree of such unity marks the degree in which such mediation is possible.

You will see here—what, perhaps, it may not have occurred to you sufficiently to dwell upon before—the wonderful organization and structure of humanity, in which every unit is bound by an infinitely subtle and complex network to the others. None can move or rest, live or die, without affecting others, and without being affected by them. It is said truly that the unity of Nature is so perfect, that fully to answer the question why a pebble lies so high on a sea-beach, and not higher, the whole laws of the world must be known, and the whole area of Nature surveyed. So is it, only more subtly, in the world of men. To tell why such and such a word is spoken in this church to-night might take you back through long

investigations of language and institutions and theology, almost to the beginning of time. There is a marvellous unity in all human history, which gives grandeur to our view of life ; but, perhaps, it almost startles you. You ask, If so, what am I ? what is left to me ? Is there no limit to this great sea of influence rounding, and shaping my soul ?

Yes ! in all human mediation there is a very distinct limit. Men may act on us without our will ; then they may change our circumstances, give or take away opportunities, affect all that makes our happiness, but they can do no more. They cannot directly affect the spirit, in its inalienable freedom, in its responsibility to God's perfect justice. The sins of fathers are visited upon children, and those of children upon the fathers ; but it is in their consequences, not (as Ezekiel so earnestly pleads)¹ in their guilt. The goodness of men may give greater scope and opportunity for goodness to others, but it can do no more ; it is the daily lamentation of love that so often it lavishes all in vain. Then again men may tell upon the spirit of others ; else what means all the labour of teaching ? whence comes the magic power of example ? what is the still more subtle and more mysterious personal influence, which men shed out and take in, we know not how, through all the pores of their being ? But then the will must consent ; with degrees of adhesion varying from mere acquiescence to enthusiastic sympathy, still it must consent. So only can the spiritual doors be unbarred which, except by consent, none but the Spirit of God can pass.

¹ See Ezekiel xviii.

I would press upon you, brethren, the fact of this all-important limitation of the power exercised upon us by others, or by us on them. It is with it, as with all other laws of nature; we can use it only by obeying it. Three-fourths of our failures in the work—failures which wring the hearts of so many parents, and teachers, and ministers of Christ—come from our seeking to do too much, forgetting the sacredness of individual conscience and freedom; and then by reaction falling back in despair from that which we might rightly and successfully do.

You will see at once that the limitation depends on the limitation of our unity one with another. If we could always enter into the spirit of another, in knowledge or in power—if we could spread a spiritual influence in it like the power of God's grace, there would be no such limitation. Our mediation, even before the consent of the will, might work upon the spirit. But this, as I have already said, is denied—in mercy denied—to man; it is God's power and privilege, and His alone. Therefore it is that our Lord's Mediation is the only mediation which is utterly limitless in its scope. He is God. He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. Therefore He can so take our nature that, even in His humanity indissolubly united to the Godhead, He can have a deep and universal communion with every soul of man. His Mediation for the race of human creatures can be real, because He is man; it can be infinite, because He is God.

It is a truth difficult to grasp, therefore Holy Scripture has, so to speak, accumulated metaphor to bring it home to us. You know how He is called "the second Adam."

Strange, mysterious is the unity of blood, even in its effect on the soul ; most strange, though most familiar, to see the very character and features of the remotest ancestor reproducing themselves in his children. It is the only human mediation which even seems to pass that spiritual limit of which I spoke above. And so this unity is made to shadow out the greater unity of Christ with us ; while yet we are warned that it is greater. "The first Adam is of the earth, earthy ; the second Adam is the Lord from heaven : " "the first Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit." "In Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive," but (as St. Paul profoundly argues in the Romans) with a grace which did "much more abound," a blessing which much more than undid the curse of the Fall.¹

You know, again, how in respect of that inner unity of the Church with Christ, into which all men are called again and again, all the richness of profusion in metaphor is lavished on this truth. Christ is the vine, we are His branches, through whom the sap of His grace throbs. Christ is the head, we are His body, through which works all the nervous energy of the brain. Christ is the bridegroom, the whole Church is His bride, united to Him by that tie above the natural tie, which supersedes all others. Or again, to take comparisons which still preserve the sense of our perfect individuality. We are the living stones of a great building, He is the foundation on which all rest, the corner-stone by which each

¹ See 1 Cor. xv. 22, 45, 47 ; Rom. v. 15—21.

wall is directed and squared.¹ Nor is the great doctrine kept by the Church as a mystery, only to be taught to the few. Like all other deep doctrines, it has its simple form, it is the beginning as well as the end. When you teach your children that they are "members of Christ," and therefore "children of God, and heirs of heaven," you are really teaching them the great truth of Christ's Mediation, in virtue of which their souls are united to Him, washed in His Blood, living in His Divine life. Do you find that this truth seems too hard or too dry to them? No! you will find that the childlike faith lays hold of it gladly, and realizes it with a vividness which saddens and shames us who are men.

You will see, then, how our thought has again gradually led us up to Christ. We have seen that mediation is the great law of life; we have seen its power, we have observed its limitation; we have noticed those limitations disappear as we conceive the Deity of Christ. All these things lead us up to Christ; they show His perfect Mediation possible, they may teach us to look for it in hope. They can do, they need do, no more. We listen to His own voice. He tells us not only that such Mediation can be, but (thank God!) that it is. Read His deeper teachings to the disciples in St. John's Gospel; you will find this truth running through all as the foundation, and starting out again and again to light. But above all I would direct your thoughts to the seventeenth chapter, because it leads us to think of that great truth, most of all great truths neglected (I think) in Christian

¹ See John xv. 1; 1 Cor. xii. 12; Eph. iv. 15, 16, v. 23, ii. 20—22; 1 Cor. iii. 11.

preaching and thought, yet the very present witness of this great doctrine—I mean His Intercession for us in heaven. There, on the very eve of His death, in His last earthly words before the agony of the Cross, He began that work : in heaven at this moment it goes on, and shall go on to the end of all things. At times the clouds which closed on His ascension have opened to show Him there,—to St. Stephen in his martyrdom, to St. Paul in the great crisis of his conversion, to St. John in the unearthly revelations of Patmos. But always He is there, always He is carrying on, through all the ages, the work of which His few years on earth were but the beginning ; always we look up to Him, when we pray, “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” when we acknowledge Him to be in spiritual presence “in the midst of us,” when at the Holy Table we plead His sacrifice, in reliance of His pleading it in heaven. No truth is so completely the witness of His Godhead and of His present salvation ; none so thoroughly meets the bold declaration, “We need not a dead Christ, but a living one.” Now what said that Intercession of His on earth ? what may we therefore reverently suppose that His Intercession now says in heaven ? Through the whole runs the one great truth ; we hear of the “eternal life” given through Him to men “in the knowledge of God ;” we hear of “the glory given” to them, which had been “given to Him ;” till at last there rise out of the rest the two greatest passages of all. There is the prayer for the present, that “As Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, they may be one in us.” “I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in Me.” There is the prayer (or, if you will, the

promise) for the future : "I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am," in the eternal communion of heaven, in the unveiled knowledge of God. He has spoken. On His word, even though He speak mystery, we rest secure.

You will see at once how the truth branches out into the two great doctrines of which we have spoken already. Because Christ is God, taking on Him the nature of man, and being united with it for ever, therefore can the bondage of sin and death be broken, and the race of man can go free. Because Christ is man, brought into the communion of the Godhead, and so able to break down all barriers which limit human unity, therefore He can offer a perfect sacrifice for all, and be our Propitiation with God. Only when we conceive the reality of his Mediation can we ever conceive what such Redemption and such Propitiation mean.

The Atonement itself is but a part of the Mediation ; it is that part which involves suffering and death, the fruits of man's sin. From them we know that even human mediation will not turn away. It is said that every true king of men must wear a crown of thorns ; that every one who would save men must be content to bear a cross : and in its measure that saying is true. Every family has in its annals stories of such sacrifice, the supreme beauty of which is that it is hardly conscious, that it accepts its suffering as a matter of course. Every nation reckons on such willingness to suffer, as one element of its national force ; every Church thinks it but natural that it should have its martyrs, and that their blood should be the seed of a new growth. I would

have you observe especially in this view, that none who so bears suffering for others, looks upon it as a punishment; each counts it privilege, glory, almost joy to bear it. I would have you observe also that there are thousands of cases in which such mediation saves those who cannot save themselves, and in which those who will bear suffering can "see of the travail of their soul and be satisfied." Only they cannot bear all; they cannot bear really the sins of their brethren. It was in this, not in the physical particulars of agony, that the real burden of the Cross lay. The mocking, the scourging, the nakedness under the scorching eyes of hatred, the pangs and weariness of slow-coming death—all these others have borne, and all these He bore in the majesty of an unbroken calmness. But the true essence of His suffering was in the spiritual darkness, in which the sense of the sins which He bore, wrung from Him the one exceeding bitter cry. Yet even this we know that He bore, actually "despising the shame, for the joy" of our Redemption "set before Him;" it is not the word of Christ, it is our own perversion of it, which tells us of His bearing the punishment of sin as a punishment, and so creates a difficulty in the whole conception of the dispensation of the Cross.

So, brethren, it is that He takes away the sins of the world; so it is that He is one with humanity in His great Mediation. Does He take away your sins and mine? Is He really one with you and you with Him?

To answer these questions is, after all, the one thing needful in this life, burdened with sin, and too often alien from God. But the answer must depend still on

the free action of the will of each individual soul. The sin of our nature in its bondage and in its guilt is surely broken for us, because "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." But whether our own sins—the sins of our childhood, our youth, our manhood, and our age—the sins of thought and word and deed—ever varying like a cloud in their colour and their form, but always darkening the sunlight of God's presence—whether these are forgiven depends on the further question, whether we come to Christ in true humility of repentance, and in true assurance of faith; whether the language of the prayers and hymns of this holy season is really made our own. There can be no doubt that He calls us to come unto Him. "He stands at the door, and knocks." But we must come for ourselves; we and no other must open the door of our hearts. When He entered Jerusalem, He wept over those who would not be gathered to Him. God grant that He weep not over any soul here! God grant that He be able to say, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

And just so it is in regard to the other question so inseparably connected with this. Are we really one with Him? No doubt again that there is such an unity with Him; the "Communion of Saints," in Him and through Him, is the necessary and certain privilege of the "Holy Catholic Church," of which we are members. Grace has been with us since the day that we were His; and that grace is a constant drawing to Him.

But, again, whether we have been drawn, depends on our will. Prayer and praise, and Holy Communion at the

Holy Table,—these are so many ties of the soul, but they may be left loose and neglected ; they may be fastened tight, and yet be so dead that no life-blood throbs through them. There is but one sign of unity, and that sign is love. You cannot doubt it in Him ; none can hear the story of His life and not feel it ; none can hear the tale of His Passion read day by day in the deep silence of churches, and not be melted by it. But what of yourselves ? Have you really love to Him ? Do you lean on His sympathy ? Do you pour out your hearts in thankfulness ? Do you gladly sacrifice for His sake what you hold dear ? Does the thought of Him really colour and mould your life ? If it does so even imperfectly, if you earnestly long that it should do so in perfection, then, then only is the unity living—living to your eternal joy. That unity is a great fact to humanity ; none that lives can be as if it had not been ; but what it is to you depends, under His grace, on yourselves.

There is an Eastern story of the Amreeta-water of immortality, which, drunk by the impure, ran through their veins in the liquid fire of unspeakable agony ; drunk by the pure, it spread through their whole being the glow of eternal life and peace. It is but an allegory of the truth. God grant us to know the reality in its form of blessing, now, henceforth, and for ever !

VI.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

(Good Friday.)

VI.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

(Good Friday.)

GALATIANS VI. 14.

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

To glory in the Cross—to glory (that is) in the emblem of shame and agony—is one of those expressions of paradox, through which the Word of God drives home a great truth, and nails it to the memory by the force of an apparent contradiction.

Through all this Holy Week, and especially on this Holy Day, the Cross has been (as St. Paul said to the Galatians) visibly “painted up” before our eyes. Every day the story of the Agony and the Betrayal, of the Rejection and the Crucifixion, has been read to us in the words of the Evangelists, always calm through their exceeding depth of feeling, often silent through their exceeding reverence. Every day the roll of Prophecy has told us what that Cross was, when seen through the mists of futurity; every day Apostles have shown us yet more plainly what it was,

when seen close at hand and imprinted on the whole of life's consciousness ; every day in the old prayers of the Church, and in the hymns, which in these days seem the mark and expression of a new-born fervour of worship, we have poured out before God our conviction of what the Cross is to us in the present. But yet through all this the tone of thought seems hardly that of "glorying;" it breathes solemnity and awe; it has in it fervent thanksgiving, but it has also a certain sense of pain. This night (for example) what can be more intensely pathetic than the prophecy of Isaiah of "one despised and rejected," "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? What more solemn than the strain in which St. Peter dwells now on the Passion itself, now on the greatness of Him, "the stone rejected by the builders, but made the head of the corner," humbled once, but now exalted to glory unapproachable? Strange it seems—I think St. Paul intended that it should be strange—to talk of "glorying in the Cross."

Nor, when we look a little closer, does the strangeness pass away. What is the first aspect of the Passion, as it is seen by the eyes of reverence and love? The first feeling is surely, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow." There is enough even in that which meets the eye. The heart follows Him, step by step, along the way of sorrows, from that hour when, after the hymn of the Last Supper, He went out to the solitude and darkness of the Agony. We see Him betrayed and deserted by His own, with scarce a flash, and even that a mistaken one, of zeal in His service. We see Him

insulted and reviled, slandered and rejected by the chiefs of the people whom He loved so well. We see Him standing before the half-reverent, half-contemptuous pity of His Roman judge, and hear the roar of hatred and blasphemy swelling out into the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas." So far as reverence permits us still to follow in thought, we hear the rude mockeries of the soldiers, and the sounds of the cruel scourge ; we go with Him, as He bears the Cross, and under it His very strength fails, on that long, weary way from the judgment-hall to the place of death ; till at last we almost feel it a relief to think of the darkness which settled down over the shame, the suffering, the long, weary dying of the Passion,—to think how the voices of hatred and taunt and reviling died out under the awfulness of the moment, and left all to a silence, broken only by the words of the Divine Sufferer, and the "Truly this was the Son of God" of the heathen at the foot of the Cross. At every step the sense of pathos and of sorrow swells, till it is hardly bearable. It seems as if they who see it even by the eye of imagination and faith could never smile again. And if, at the same time, we reflect that this great Suffering is only the type and crown of many, many sufferings, in which wickedness oppresses and crucifies goodness, through which the true servants of God have looked up, as it seemed, in vain, and beheld only a pall of darkness above them,—if we go back, even for a moment, to that picture of the "groaning and travailing of all creation," on which we dwelt last Sunday,—if, therefore, we see that the Saviour Himself suffers for others, just because He is

the true Son of Man, and that they who would be true sons of men and of God must (as He Himself says) bear, in some measure, the Cross after Him,—then all the feeling of sadness and mystery is deepened. It seems possible to have faith and patience, to have comfort and even hope ; but how is it possible to “glory” in it ? The world huddles out of sight all that is sad, mysterious, terrible ; it invents milder terms by which to denote the harsher features of life ; it deems it good taste to refrain from remembering them, or reminding others of them. What can St. Paul mean by “glorying in the Cross”—bringing it out of the darkness of sorrow and of reverence, and flaunting it, like a Crusader’s banner, in the eyes of men ?

But suppose we look even closer still, and see through the awful suffering all that it won for us. Let us strive to call back again to our minds those truths on which we have dwelt in these past nights. Let us remember that in it the bondage of sin was broken by the Redemption of God’s love, that in it all mankind gathered up in Christ their Head offered the one Sacrifice, accepted for ever and ever. Let us dwell on that even greater truth of Mediation, on which these two rest, and see in the Cross the darker, more sorrowful aspect, which such Mediation must ever wear. Yet even then it may seem hard to glory. There is in man an inner conviction that the glory and blessedness of life is in giving more than receiving ; in working for ourselves rather than in having others work for us ; in suffering and daring rather than in leaning helplessly on another’s hand. To do some great

thing for ourselves, for our fellow-men, and for God—this, and not ambition in its vulgar forms, is the “last infirmity of noble minds.” And what says the Cross to this inextinguishable longing of true manliness? It says, No! it must not, cannot be; you cannot save yourselves; you must be content to receive all; you must be content to depend not only on God, but on a Son of man, on a human, though a Divine, Mediation. In yourselves you are but bondslaves of sin and death, and you can break neither the chains of the one, nor the prison-house of doom of the other. In yourselves you are under a guilt of sin, which cannot be done away, for which you can offer no atonement whatever; for even the sacrifices you would offer need themselves to be atoned for. In yourselves you are aliens, far away from God, unable to accept the drawings of His mercy, unable to find your only life in Him; you must come to Christ to be made sons of God again. It breathes exactly the spirit of the old familiar hymn, in which we have but now cried—

“ Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

It is a message, which the natural pride and energy of man may rebel against and reject; it is one which the humbled and contrite heart may welcome in faith and thankfulness. But in no case does it seem at first sight to be a message to “glory in.” There are parts of the Gospel in which it would seem more natural to “glory.”

We can easily shout with the angelic song over the cradle of Bethlehem ; we can exult in the Hallelujahs which hail Christ risen, or ascended up on high ; we can rejoice in the exceeding glory of the Pentecostal gift and the renewal of man's nature. But why choose especially the Cross, as that in which all Christians glory ?

St. Paul, brethren, well knew and deeply felt all this strangeness. In the first Corinthian Epistle, written not long before, he had said that he knew "the Cross to be a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness." But yet, standing as he did at a great crisis in the advance of the Gospel, which was to determine whether it was to be universal, spiritual, and eternal, or whether our Lord's Revelation of God was only at best that of a second Moses, partial, legal, and temporary, he felt that, after all, it was on the Cross that he must lay hold. "I did not determine," he says, that is, "I did not care to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him as crucified." He cries out in the more vehement and picturesque language of this Epistle, to the wavering Galatians, "Let others glory as they will in the flesh," in outward law or ritual, race or circumcision. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the true instinct of Christendom has echoed his words, and accepted this his spiritual ultimatum. The Cross—not the holy cradle or the broken tomb—has always been its chosen, its prized and beloved emblem. It rises over the Christian Sanctuary, and you see it, as here, ornamented in richness, and wreathed into forms of beauty ; it has dictated the very form of our

noblest Christian Churches; it is marked on the brow of every Christian child; proud nations like our own have borne it gleaming on their banners, through the wars which contradict its whole teaching; we have seen it but lately, in more truly Christ-like spirit, marking with its blood-red sign that ministration which wandered through the battle-field to heal and to bless, to be the one bright spot in all last year's terrible recollections. You know how in the old Christian legend it was the Cross, seen bright in heaven, which gave the sign under which a world should be conquered. And this use of it is exactly what may be called "glorying" in it. It was once an emblem of shame, all and more than all that the gallows is to us; but now it is the sacred form which men delight to enrich with their jewels and their gold, or even to mould to lovely shapes, in which its own roughness seems almost lost. Outwardly at least—would that it were more so inwardly!—all Christendom has gloried in the Cross.

There have been times—I think we are living in one now—when men have chosen especially to denounce or explain away the Cross, and seek to eliminate it from Christianity, willing although they are to accept much else that is Christian, reverencing in some sense the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging the purity of Christian morality, nay even the regenerating power of Christian faith. But be sure that the Gospel without the Cross is nothing. The Atonement, in our theology, and religious communion with God, the temper of self-sacrifice in our life for God and man—these two elements of the Cross lie at the very heart of Christianity, and to tear them out would

be its death. We must nail our Red Cross standard to the mast, and resolve not only to acknowledge, but still, as of old, to "glory in" the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But such glorying, such rejoicing in the Cross—(let us understand and acknowledge this clearly)—marks a joy which has in it an undercurrent of seriousness. It is the rejoicing which belongs to humanity as it is, to the world as we see it now. It has in it a tone suiting those who feel that they are ransomed sinners, and that life as it is, is in many points a sad, and in all a serious thing. It has always been said, and that very truly, that in Christian art and literature—that is, in the acted or spoken thought of Christians—there is a pervading sadness which Paganism knows not as a rule, although in the despairing cries which break through Pagan rejoicings there is a sorrow without hope which no Christian can ever feel. A Greek temple is all bright and glowing, and finished in its perfection : we deem a Christian church not wholly beautiful, if it has in it no sense of awe, no "dim religious light," no suggestion of beauty greater than it realizes. We ourselves feel that in the expressions of joy which fill these our churches—as, for instance, we hear them in the music which floats over a great congregation on the most festive day—there must still be a solemnity ; we should resent the sounds of laughter or the reckless joviality of profane music. We especially should feel it ; it has even been made a reproach to us, that in our English character there is a want of light-hearted abandonment to merriment. But to my mind, the more the world grows old, the more we understand the greatness and the com-

plexity of life, the more we feel the mysteries of the Gospel itself, so much the more this underlying seriousness must be felt. Our very poetry, our very music, has lost some of the fresh light-heartedness of earlier days. God teaches us more, and by that teaching we know more of our ignorance. I cannot imagine the life of one who glories in the Cross without a background of serious thoughtfulness. The great idea of the Cross in some lives, not the least noble, comes out like a stern severe unison, putting all other music to silence. But in all it should be as the dominant theme of some great symphony, always reasserting itself as supreme over the under harmonies of this life's music. Wherever it is, however it is heard, there must breathe in it some deep solemnity of tone. It is only children who—life being what it is—can have rejoicing, sunny without a cloud, light-hearted with no afterthought of seriousness. In others such a tone is not childlike, but mere childishness.

But taking this tone and spirit of glorying for granted as the only one which becomes a Christian, surely we can see very clearly, and feel deeply, why we should glory in the Cross.

First, of course, and chiefly, we glory in the revelation made through it of the exceeding love and mercy of God to sinners, such as we feel that we ourselves are. All the signs of His goodness in the beauty and grandeur of nature—all the gifts, marvellous both in their intensity and their greatness, with which He has endowed man, the puny creature of one little planet, who can yet measure and calculate the laws of the universe, and even then

is not content till he rises to Him who made it—all these, great as they are, are yet insufficient, so long as we know of nothing which can conquer sin and take the sting from death. If ever you look out on the sinfulness of man's life, and on the exquisite misery which that sinfulness brings, you feel in it the one present thing which shakes your faith in God. But what if the power of decay and death forces itself upon your soul? What if you walk, for instance, through the stately permanence or crumbling ruin of some old cathedral, and ask, Where are those who worshipped century after century in these walls? Where are those whose dust lies under our feet and mingles with the earth on which we tread so lightly? What if you wander through the halls and ruined cloisters of history, and think of all the races, all the institutions, all the religions, which have passed away? What if (to come nearer home) you stand, the remnant of a bygone generation, and mark how, one by one, those who were as your own soul are gone? The effect on the mind is not so keen and piercing as the horror of sin; but it is more dreary and depressing. You ask, What is man? what is life? It is well if you go not on to ask, "Where, and what, is God?" Then it is that you learn the exceeding joy of glorying in the Cross. It is the Atonement which, above all other manifestations of God, tells us that He cares for sinning and dying man, and that He does not leave us to be the prey of sin and death. It shows us the unspeakable dignity and preciousness even of sinful man in His sight, when the Eternal One was content (as our Collect has it) not only to come down and humble Himself to

the likeness of man, but content to be "betrayed and given up to the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross." In spite of the weight of sin on the wings of our soul, in spite of that doom of death under which we move like shadows in a dream—we feel that man can glory still.

Yes! brethren, and we feel that we ourselves can glory, because our souls are precious in His sight. We turn to the crucified Lord, and we see that, in the agony of His great suffering for all, He could yet stoop to the sins and sorrows of each. He could pray pardon for His murderers; He could give pardon to the penitent thief. As we come to Him in faith, and pray earnestly for His pardon and His grace, we know that they are given us indeed; we know that sin's guilt is washed away and its power trampled down within us. And, knowing this, we can look calmly even on the face of death. When all laughter of life is silenced, when all earthly love and brightness go out at the edge of the darkness, we can glory still, if only we "glory in the Cross."

But behind this greater reason comes the other ground of glorying in the Cross, because of the dignity which in it is given to man. What can show more the Divine Sonship in man, the unspeakable dignity and sacredness of his free spirit, than the fact that, in the great work of Redemption, man must meet God in the Nature of the Saviour? The Lord, who, by one word, could make or destroy the material universe, yet—such is His own eternal law—cannot save man, and make him perfect for heaven, unless the Godhead is incarnate in man, and

works through man indeed. How marvellously does this show us that man's nature is really in God's image, is not a mere link in a long series of material organizations ! How wonderfully does it teach us that, while all other things are instruments, man can be, and must be, a "fellow-worker with God." None can be saved, none can be lost, except with his own will. Look at the Cross in this light. You see there One who, to the careless eye, is despised and rejected indeed, utterly helpless, utterly pitiable, swept away, it seemed, half-contemptuously, by the malice of His enemies,—all the work of His life destroyed, all His little band of disciples scattered. I often think how strange it is to remember that our whole earth seen from the nearest orb of God's creation, is so small, that all human creatures in it would seem as nothing ; that, even from a tenth of the distance, the things which we think grand would be as specks ; and the greatest gatherings of men, which we deem so sublime or so terrible, less than the running together of a few insects on an ant-hill. But if so, how utterly nothing seems the suffering of one poor despised man in the scheme of the universe, the merest grain of dust in the golden balance of destiny. And yet we know that, in that one human nature, all the transcendent purposes of God were concentrated. Without the Son of Man, man could not have been redeemed.

But in all this you may say, "Christ was utterly alone in His power to redeem : what dignity comes thence to us ?" Then look at Him only as a sufferer ; think how immeasurably it exalts the sense of man's spiritual power,

to see that all the malice of earth and hell is arrayed against Him, and yet is utterly powerless to conquer His will fixed on God, or to destroy His Spirit. We are in a world which, whether we like to own it or not, we must confess to be one of suffering and trial—one in which at any moment what seems a crushing power may come upon us by the laws of nature, or by the malice of man. It is glorious perhaps to see the hero, who stands up against such power in his own strength, to conquer it, or unconquered to die. But how far grander, because calmer and less fitful, is that power of humble endurance in a higher strength, which Christ has been pleased to share with so many of His followers. The body may be shamed and scorned, tortured and gradually worn away; the soul may be left utterly desolate, or worse than desolate, of all that man gives; and yet anchored upon God, guided by His unerring hand, it can ride unmoved and calm through the wildest storm, and reach safely the haven where it would be. Surely, if it were only for the glory shed on humanity, we might "glory in the Cross."

Brethren, I cannot think that on such an evening as this, gathered in the solemnity of God's worship, under the spell of all the various tones in which this day preaches the Cross to you, this line of thought and feeling can be quite strange to you. But what when it passes away, and we go back to our ordinary life? How shall we show then that we glory in the Cross? "By it," says St. Paul, "the world is crucified to me, and I to the world."

“The world is crucified to us ;” that is, I suppose, the world is rejected, renounced, dead to us, as we promised at our baptism it should be. The world (I take it) is the sum of earthly things and of earthly beings. How is it to be crucified to us? In St. Paul’s life, in the life of many of the Apostles and martyrs of human kind, the answer was simple. They did actually give up all earthly occupations, enjoyments, and ties, to be absorbed in the one work of living and dying for Christ. And sometimes it does seem that, hard as this is, it would be simpler with one great wrench to break loose from all worldly moorings, and be alone with Christ on the great tide which bears us on to eternity. But with most of us this may not and cannot be. Our lot is cast in the world ; it is inevitable, and it is needful, that its knowledge, its civilization, its blessings, and its duties should occupy much of the foreground of our life. But still the Cross tells us that the mark of death and decay is upon all, and that we must open our eyes to see it. More and more, every day as we grow older, and know more of life, we must feel that in that life there is but one enduring object worth living for, and that is, to do God’s will and to set forth His glory, to live in Christ and Christ in us. We must detach our hearts from earthly things—pleasures, wealth, fame, power ; we must learn to be their masters and not their slaves, to use them (it may be), but not to rest upon or greatly care for them. Ay, and the affections which draw us to persons, and so educate us in the love of God—these also, while we cultivate them, we must still prune and keep down, suffering them not to fill wholly the heart which they cannot

satisfy ; content, if God calls us, to be alone with Christ, in His service, and His love. So is the world "crucified to us" in various degrees and manners as God wills it for each.

And "to be crucified to the world"—this, I think, brethren, means to be sensible of struggle and sacrifice in life, to bear the Cross, and, if God bids us, even to be nailed to it. There must be, since we are what we are, some struggle in life. There are in us all, sins to be what the Bible calls "crucified ;" that is, to be conquered and torn up, slowly, painfully, and with shame. There are temptations, which none but ourselves know, and against which we must nerve ourselves to strive, against which we must watch and pray, even if it be to agony. There are hard duties to do, and it will need many a battle with ourselves, many a sacrifice of old hopes and desires, ere they can be done. These things come more or less to every life ; and with less regularity and certainty, but in almost all lives actually, there will come some call to pain and sacrifice. It may be to bear actual suffering in misfortune and sickness and pain, in bereavement, and in disappointment of cherished hopes and schemes. It may be to make sacrifices—to see on one side what seem happiness and love and glory, and on the other the track of our Lord's footsteps, and to turn the face resolutely to follow Him. In our measure, as we can bear them, God calls us to these also. I cannot endure the superstition or presumption which will invent sacrifices and manufacture crosses for ourselves. But ask any experience of life, and you will find that they will come ; and in them we

must be ready "to be crucified to the world," so to glory in the Cross of Christ, so hereafter to share His crown.

You will see how insensibly our thoughts have glided into a solemnity, which yet is not sadness. Such surely is the lesson of to-day; yet it can never be thought of, except in connection with the Easter to which it leads. The solemn strains which will close this service will be but as an introduction to the Hallelujahs of Easter. The meditations of our Holy Week should be but a preparation for the Holy Communion of Easter joy. In that, at least as much as in any worship of to-day, we shall glory in the Cross, when we commemorate His precious death, and drink in the grace of His Resurrection; but then the element of sadness will be absorbed, or at least subordinated to the element of joy. Remember, I beseech you, how frequently, how earnestly your crucified Lord calls you to meet Him there. Do you feel your sinfulness, struggling and repenting against it, yet sinning still? Know that in that very struggle is the sign of spiritual life, won for you by the Cross; be not afraid that any can "eat and drink judgment to himself," unless he comes in carelessness or hypocrisy; remember that He came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance and to Him.

Brethren, it has been my privilege, a privilege deeply valued, here, night after night, to hold up the Cross to you, and to dwell on the various aspects of Redeeming Love. I linger insensibly over the words which bid you farewell. But there is nothing that I can so much wish

for you, no sign so certain that in these meditations we have learnt to "know Christ crucified," as the glad gathering at the Communion of the great Easter festival, to eat spiritually the flesh and drink the blood of the sacrifice so freely offered for us. We glory in the Cross most truly when there we hail Him—when in those old familiar words, which no newer strains of music can ever supersede in our affection, we sing that—

"Jesus Christ is risen to-day,
Our triumphant holyday ;"

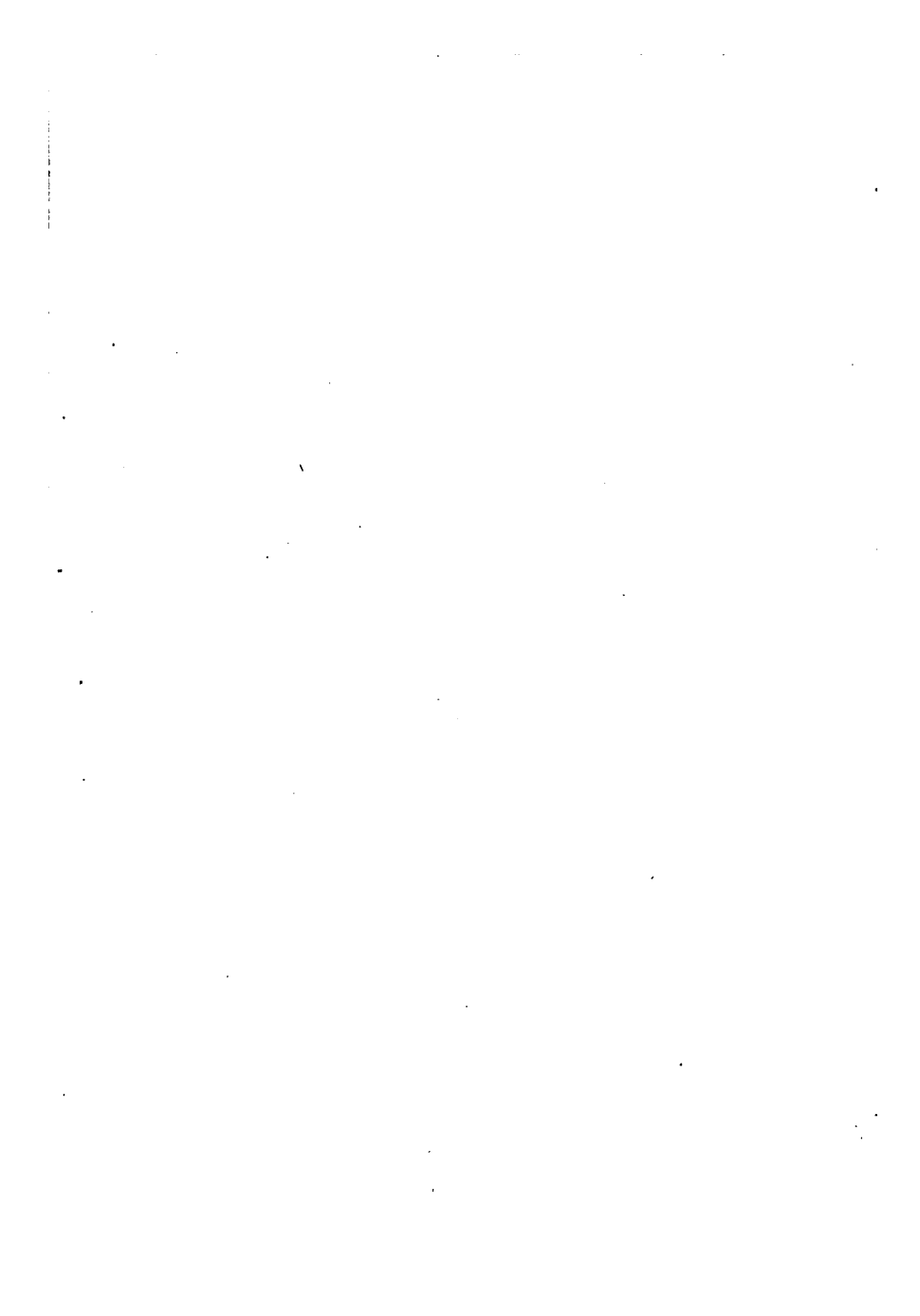
even the same Jesus—

"Who did once upon the Cross
Suffer to redeem our loss."

Yet, even more gladly and more solemnly, at our Communion Feast, we link the Good Friday to the Easter Day, the Cross to the Resurrection, when we praise "Him, the very Paschal Lamb offered for us, who by His death has destroyed death, and by His rising again has restored everlasting life."

THE END.

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the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation 2000). The prevalence of mental health problems has increased in the general population, and the incidence of mental health problems has increased in the prison population.

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the mental health needs of prisoners. The Department of Health (2000) has published a strategy for mental health services, which includes a commitment to improve the mental health of prisoners. The Department of Health (2000) has also published a strategy for mental health services, which includes a commitment to improve the mental health of prisoners.

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